NATIONAL

E74-21268

BOSTON UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL

Dissertation

THE SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY OF GEORGES SOREL

by

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submitted in partial fulfilment of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

1938

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Nature of the problem. The problem undertaken in this dissertation is to determine whether the writings of Georges Sorel express a unified and consistent social philosophy.

Organization of the dissertation. The organization of the dissertation is based on the assumption that the life and writings of Sorel may be divided into five distinct periods, namely, the period prior to 1892 which is herein indicated as his traditionalist period; the period beginning about 1893 in which he was affiliated with the socialist movement; the period of his syndicalist connections beginning about 1898; the period beginning about 1910 in which he was associated with the monarchists who sought the return of the hereditary monarchy in France; finally, the period beginning in 1914 characterized by a revival of interest in the proletariat, particularly as related to the success of the Bolshevik party in Russia in 1917.

Chapters three, four, five, six, and seven, are devoted to an analysis of the forementioned periods in Sorel's life including a brief summary of the main contentions in each chapter. Chapter eight presents some general conclusions not included in the final chapter yet of sufficient interest to warrant their

inclusion in the dissertation. The final chapter comprises a summary of the main arguments of the dissertation together with a presentation of final conclusions.

Sources of data and method of procedure. The principal sources of data consists of the writings of Sorel coupled with that biographical material and those secondary sources which appear pertinent to the problem.

The method of procedure is that of a comparative analysis of the writings of Sorel devoting special attention to those statements which relate directly to the problem. Attention has also been given to those actions of Sorel that in any way contribute to the problem and its solution.

Previous investigations. The work of Sorel has received but scant attention in England and America with the result that neither a comprehensive biography nor a complete exposition of his theories has yet appeared in either of the two countries. Such brief works as have appeared in English, treat his theories principally in connection with his syndicalist period rather than from the standpoint of his work as a whole, thus failing to do justice to Sorel, the scope and erudition of whose writings far exceeds that set forth in any one period of his life. The most outstanding of these brief English versions is probably that by Levine(1), the chief defect of which is its failure to take into account the importance of the periods both

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I. Levine, SF. See discussion of Sorel.

prior to and following Sorel's syndicalist period. Of the treatments by Neumann(2), Brooks(3), and Wagner(4), the first of these, namely, that of Neumann, is by far the most comprehensive. In all of these however, there is barely a sketch of Sorel's theories with chief emphasis devoted to his syndicalist connections and theories pertaining thereto. Laidler's discussion of Sorel, although briefer than the others mentioned, has the merit of revealing the syndicalist background into which Sorel entered and of showing his relationship to that background.(5) Two points of agreement are to be found in all of these works. All the writers agree that Sorel's syndicalist period was the most important of his life and that the only unifying factor in his work is the moral factor without which his work presents no unity whatever.

Several other English works that contain important material on Sorel and in many ways are more adequate than those already mentioned are those by Ernest Dimnet(6), Roger Soltau(7),

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2. Neumann, "Georges Sorel," ESS, Vol.XIV, 222-4.
3. Brooks, AS, 55,6.
4. Wagner, SR, 548-50. Sorel selections, 550-60.
5. Laidler, HST, 348-91.
6. Dimnet, FHA, section on Sorel.
7. Soltau, FPTNC, section on syndicalism.

Note:
For key to the book title abbreviations see bibliography where the abbreviation accompanies the listing of the books. Thus Soltau, FPTNC indicates Soltau's work, <u>French Political Thought in the Nineteenth Century</u>.

Richard Dale Humphrey(8), and T.E. Hulme.(9) Dimnet's work is a treatment concerning French political and cultural history and in view of its Roman Catholic point of view is particularly interesting in its references to Sorel. Soltau's work deals with the origins and growth of French political thought and in the discussion of syndicalism in France gives an interesting and scholarly view of the relations between Sorel and the syndicalist movement as a whole. Dale's dissertation concerns itself with Sorel's anti-intellectualism in relation to his interpretation of history and is one of the few English works that deals with Sorel in a most thoroughgoing manner. The work is not very comprehensive since it deals with only one phase of Sorel's thought. Finally, mention ought to be made of Hulme's masterly translation of Sorel's principal work and the only work of his translated into English, namely, Réflexions sur la violence. In this translation Mr. Hulme has succeeded in conveying to the reader all of the caustic wit and bitter sarcasm of Sorel's jibes. This epigrammatic style, so characteristic of Sorel, reached a climax in the Réflexions, and nothing has been lost of it in translation.

In Italy the work of Sorel is much better known than in England or America, indeed in some ways the Italians have shown more appreciation of his work than his own countrymen. Sorel

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8. Humphrey, GSIH(Ph.D. dissertation at Harvard. Permission of author required for use of this.)

9. Hulme, RVGS. This translation does not contain the 1919 appendix "Pour Lenine" which Sorel added to the fourth edition.

was deeply interested in the progress of the workers movements in Italy and wrote many articles for the Italisn reviews and socialist periodicals. Most of his works have been translated into Italian and the strength of the syndicalist movement in Italy assured him of a wide and sympathetic reading public. The most significant Italian works on Sorel are those by the following authors: Lanzillo(10), Prezzolini(11), Aquilanti(12), and Racca.(13) The first of these may be regarded as Italy's official biographer of Sorel. Labriola and the young editor of l'Avanti were among those who gave an enthusiastic welcome to Sorel's Réflexions. The young editor was none other than Benito Mussolini. So important was Sorel's interest in the Italian socialist movement that Johannet has remarked:

> Quelques-unes des pensées soréliennes les plus drues, n'ont trouvé. . . qu'une expression italienne, et c'est souvent au seul public italien que M. Sorel a réservé ses plus précieuses confidences.(14)

In any case it is clear that Sorel's work met with a far more enthusiastic welcome in Italy than in any other land, including his own, and in terms of actual achievement it will be seen that it was principally in Italy that Sorel's doctrines became the basis for an entirely new social and political movement.

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10. Lanzillo, Giorgio Sorel, 1910.
11. Prezzolini, La teoria sindacalista, 1909.
12. Aquilanti, Giorgio Sorel, 1916.
13. Racca, Giorgio Sorel e il socialismo, 1902.
14. Johannet, II, 185.

Despite what has just been said concerning Italian investigations of Sorel's work, it was in France that the greatest amount of literary interest in his work appeared, and it is to France that one must turn to find the most significant treatises concerning him. Of the briefer works the most important are the studies by Johannet(15) and Pirou.(16) As in the English works, these two writers emphasize the moral aspect of Sorel's theories, however, more attention is given to the sources of Sorel's thought than in the English works. Both attempt to sketch the development of Sorel's ideas and in view of the brevity of the treatments this is adequately handled.

Of the longer and more thorough investigations of the work of Sorel by French writers those of Cheydleur(17) and Perrin(18) are perhaps the most accurate and impartial. The former study traces the development of Sorel's thought throughout the various periods of his life in much the same fashion as M. Pirou but with greater wealth of detail including frequent reference to the primary sources. M. Perrin does not treat the developmental aspect of Sorel, but deals rather with the principal ideas in his work. Both of these works are commendable in that they give an adequate account of Sorel's doctrines without recourse to polemics for or against socialism or syndical-

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15. Johannet, Itinéraires d'intellectuels, 1921.
16. Pirou, Georges Sorel, 1927.
17. Cheydleur, Évolution des doctrines de Georges Sorel, 1914.
18. Perrin, Les idées sociales de Georges Sorel, 1925.

ism. Of the other more extended studies on Sorel, those by Valois(19), Bougle(20), Guy-Grand(21), Serbos(22), Berth(23), Ascoli(24), Ralea(25), and Angel(26), are the most interesting and informative. The works by Berth and Valois are particularly interesting in view of the fact that both men were very closely associated with Sorel.

Of the numerous articles that have appeared in French periodicals in connection with Sorel's work it is extremely difficult to give an adequate account in this brief introduction. However, because of the different points of view which they represent, the following deserve mention. The article by Paul Bonte in the 1920 February issue of the Revue des jeunes entitled, "Les sympathies catholiques de Georges Sorel." Also from the religious point of view and equally interesting is the article by H. du Passage in the Jesuit journal Étude for January, February, and March, 1913. This is essentially a Jesuit appraisal of Sorel's moral preoccupations with a criticism of

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19. Valois, L'Homme qui vient, 1906; La monarchie et la classe ouvrière, 1909.
20. Bougle, Syndicalisme et democratie, 1908.
21. Guy-Grand, La philosophie syndicaliste, 1911.
22. Serbos, Une philosophie de la production: le neo-marxisme syndicaliste, 1913.
23. Berth, Guerre des États ou guerre des classes, 1924; La fin d'une culture, 1927.
24. Ascoli, Georges Sorel, 1921.
25. Ralea, L'idée de révolution dans les doctrines socialistes.
26. Angel, Essais sur Georges Sorel, 1936.

Note:
Elsewhere the standard title abbreviations are used.

the radical groups through which he was working. Maletsky's article in l'Internationale communiste for March 1923, represents the communist critique of Sorel's theories. Maurice Spronk's article in Le Correspondant for Jan.10, 1909, "L'esprit nouveau des revolutionnaires. Un théoricien du syndicalisme M. Georges Sorel," not only contains some valuable material on the syndicalist views of Sorel, but also presents a fine tribute to his character.

Following his death in 1922 many articles appeared in the French reviews and periodicals paying tribute to the life and thought of Sorel. He was hailed by the press of the right and left respectively, both claiming him as their own. Among these many tributes paid him the following are valuable as sources of material on Sorel as well as for the skilful manner in which they sum up his life and theories. Tribute from the extreme right was tendered by Georges Valois in his article "Georges Sorel" in the monarchist journal Action française for September 1922. The article appearing in the Vie ouvrière by Robert Louzon in the same month represented the French working class tribute to Sorel. Four more articles that appeared in the September journals for 1922 lauding Sorel's work and presenting interesting material on his life and thought are, "Souvenirs de Georges Sorel" by his historian brother, Albert-Emile, which appeared in Echo de Paris; Paul Souday's article "Les livres: Georges Sorel" in Le temps; Jean Variot's article in Eclair, "Quelques souvenirs, le père Sorel;" and an article by the same writer in Revue universelle, "Georges Sorel."

Two other articles deserving of mention are, the article in Humanite for March 1922, "Chez Georges Sorel" by Lecache which was written some months previous to the death of Sorel and is of special interest in view of Sorel's frequent criticism of the socialist publication during his lifetime. The second article has already been mentioned, namely, Soltau's treatment of Sorel in his book French Political Thought in the Nineteenth Century. This is mentioned again because the section on Sorel and syndicalism can be read wholly apart from the rest of the book insofar as one is interested only in Sorel. This is undoubtedly one of the finest short treatments of Sorel in any language.(27)

Sorel's work was little known in Germany in his own day nor has it succeeded in gaining wider esteem in recent years. In view of the fact that Germany's socialist tradition was rooted in Marx and his German followers and interpreters it seems quite natural that Sorel's thought did not penetrate there. Besides, the Marxian school from the time of Marx himself has never held the more utopian French social thinkers in very high esteem. Two German works of recent years deserve mention however as late German attempts to introduce Sorel in that land, namely, the books of Niederreuther(28) and Freund.(29) Neither work however, does full justice to the many-sided thought of Sorel.

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27. Complete list of articles on Sorel in bibliography.

28. Niederreuther, Georges Sorels Betrachtungen über die Wirtschaft, 1934.

29. Freund, Georges Sorel der revolutionäre Konservatismus, 1932.

CHAPTER II

SOREL'S LIFE AND WORKS

His life. Georges Sorel was born at Cherbourg in 1847 and remained in Normandy throughout the years of his youth. During this period he was greatly influenced by his mother, an extremely pious woman, who imparted to him a deep and lasting concern for the moral aspect of things. This moral interest continued to play a dominant role in the life and thought of Sorel and was, in part at least, the cornerstone of his social philosophy. In regard to his family background it is signifi-ant that it was a mixture of middle class and working class elements. Essentially a typical middle class French family, the mother of Sorel was herself of working class stock.

At the age of sixteen he entered the Polytechnic School which he attended for four years. Upon completion of his technical studies Sorel entered the civil service in the capacity of an engineer in the Department of Highways and Bridges. During twenty-five years of service he was advanced to the position of chief engineer and decorated with the cross of the Legion of Honor. Partly as a result of his experiences in government service there was engendered in him a new set of social attitudes of such a nature that in 1892 he retired from government ser-

vice to devote himself to the study of social problems upon which he seems to have been reflecting for some time prior to his actual retirement from his civil service duties.(1)

Sorel's new social sentiments inclined him towards socialism and for several years he contributed to Marxist periodicals. However, his intellectual independence soon asserted itself and carried him beyond the intellectual confines of both the orthodox and the revisionist schools of Marxist thought.

By 1897 he had ceased to write for the Marxist reviews and periodicals and had begun to study social problems from a point of view hostile to the socialist groups. As a result of a study of the British labor movement he now came to believe that the success of socialism depended on the autonomous development of trade unions or syndicats as they were called in France.(2) Study of the French syndicats in the light of his

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I. Gaetan Pirou merely remarks that Sorel was over forty years of age when he began to write on social problems. However, at the time of his retirement, which is the real starting-point of his social studies, Sorel was forty-five years old.

2. The term syndicat in French is used in the same way as the English word union, namely to designate an association of workmen formed to protect the members against injustices imposed on them by their employers. On the other hand, the term syndicalism involves a complete social philosophy not to be associated with the simpler functions of either the French syndicats or the British labor unions.

The English word syndicate has no special reference to labor union activities and has no connection with the French word syndicat as defined above.

It is for these reasons that the French form syndicat is maintained throughout the dissertation

knowledge of the English labor unions, coupled with the influence of Fernand Pelloutier and the development of the Dreyfus case convinced him of the correctness of his new point of view.(3) However, this new alignment, during which Sorel produced his most original and most characteristic works and brought him into the ranks of syndicalism in France, proved no more permanent than his former socialist connections. It gradually became obvious to Sorel that the rank and file of syndicalists were not at all interested in any schemes for the moral regeneration of society, but were looking for far more material rewards in the immediate present. Thus by 1910 he was thoroughly disappointed in his syndicalist alliance and withdrew his active support from the movement.

Both as socialist and syndicalist Sorel had held the bourgeoisie in the utmost contempt.(4) However, when Paul Bourget attempted to give Sorel's social philosophy a bourgeois interpretation, Sorel proved to be very sympathetic and laid aside for the time being his former bias against this class.(5) He joined in an attempt to unite the radical and the reactionary

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3. Fernand Pelloutier (1867-1901) was a leader of French syndicalism prior to Sorel's entrance.

4. By <u>bourgeoisie</u> Sorel referred to that class in society that profits from the control of the tools of production and which employs workers to use the tools. There seems to be no difference between Marx and Sorel on this point, indeed Sorel probably obtained the definition from Marxian sources, if not from Marx himself.

5. Bourget, <u>La barricade</u>, 1910.

anti-democrats and was on friendly terms with a group headed by Charles Maurras which sought the restoration of the monarchy in France. It was during this period that a strong nationalistic bias appeared in Sorel's work. His connection with these reactionary elements was of short duration however, so that by 1914 his interest was again turning towards the proletariat.

The outbreak of the World War caused him deep discouragement and renewed his contempt for the governing class. He characterized the democratic sentiments of the allies as a "hypocritical cloak covering ugly plutocratic realities," arguing that the soldier participants were but the dupes of the dark machinations of bourgeois commercialism.(6)

The sudden rise to power of the Bolsheviks in Russia renewed his hopes, but with characteristic pessimism he was in doubt as to whether the new regime could survive. Sorel died in 1922 before the complete consolidation of the new Soviet regime took place.

His writings. Pirou has justly called attention to the three most formidable difficulties that lie in the path of Sorel's readers.(7) First there is the tremendous amount of his works. He contributed to some twenty-five reviews and periodicals during his lifetime, wrote many prefaces and commentaries, and produced some fifteen volumes of which a few are however

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6. Pirou, GS, 48.

7. _____, GS, 5.

merely collections of articles that had formerly appeared in the periodicals and reviews. Second, it is to be regretted that in many cases his articles are mere fragmentary comments which can only be fitted into the general scheme of his thought with great difficulty. Finally, his most friendly critics cannot but agree concerning the obscurity of his writing. His arguments are never direct and pointed, but always circuitous and diffuse, nor was his most famous work an exception. Sorel has excused the formal defects of his work by pointing out that the rules of the art of writing never interested him very much.(8) With characteristic irony he argued that for the most part rules in the art of writing were designed to enable students to absorb a vast amount of information in as brief a span as possible. In the same ironical spirit he said that his works were designed to provoke thought rather than to gain mere banal approbation. Many readers of Sorel have agreed that there is indeed a stimulating quality in his works that is frequently lacking in more orderly writings.

Two further difficulties in Sorel's writings are to be encountered in the diverse topics on which he wrote and in the lack of a systematic exposition of his theories. Ranging over the fields of philosophy, sociology, religion, history, economics, and politics, as well as the technical branches of his professional field, Sorel shows a tremendous insight and rare erudition. However, one must gather together from diverse

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8. Sorel, RV, 7.

sources a great deal of material before it is possible to get his complete view of any subject. At times he dismissed a subject with but a few passing remarks, on the other hand he sometimes devoted long sections to the same problem yet failed to achieve the insight displayed in some brief remark elsewhere in his works. Thus Socrates, Plato, Kant, Hegel, Proudhon, Marx, Hartmann, Nietzsche, and many others are treated; sometimes with a mere passing remark, at other times with the greatest detail revealing his wide knowledge of the detailed systems of such thinkers. It is, in part at least, this lack of systematic discussion that gave rise to the problem of this dissertation.

Sorel's most original and most widely read work is his Réflexions sur la violence(1908). Of his other books the following are perhaps the most important to an understanding of his theories: Le procès de Socrate(1889); L'avenir socialiste des syndicats(1898); Introduction à l'économie moderne(1903); La ruine du monde antique(1898); Le système historique de Renan (1906); Les illusions du progrès(1908); La décomposition du marxisme(1908); Matériaux d'une théorie du prolétariat(1919); and of course the Réflexions.

Among the prefaces the following are the most important: Preface to Labriola's Essais sur la conception matérialiste de l'histoire(1897); Colajanni's Le socialisme(1900); Gatti's Le socialisme et l'agriculture(1902); Labriola's Karl Marx(1910) and Seligman's L'interprétation économique de l'histoire(1911).

Among his numerous articles the following have special merit in that they reveal essential features of his thought as a whole: "La religion d'aujourd'hui;" "La science dans l'éducation;" "Les sentiments sociaux;" "L'essai sur la philosophie de Proudhon;" "Le syndicalisme révolutionnaire;" "La science et la morale;" "Les facteurs moraux de l'évolution;" "L'ethique du socialisme;" "J.J. Rousseau;" "L'évolution créatrice."

The social philosophy of Sorel developed from the most diverse sources. In economics and sociology the influence of Marx and Proudhon was strongest, although the influence of Croce, Labriola, Bernstein, de Rousiers, and Le Play, may be seen. In philosophy the pessimism of Hartmann and Nietzsche, Bergson's intuitionism, the mysticism and pragmatism of William James, all may be seen incorporated in his work. In the field of history Marx, Renan, the Bible, the church fathers, and church history, all played an important role in his thinking, particularly the latter. In church history Sorel found many analogies with the modern world and its problems. Besides the above he was well aware of the main currents of nineteenth and early twentieth century thought. Finally, as observed above, the influence of his mother from whom he derived his fine moral sentiments. It was out of this extremely diversified background that the thought of Sorel developed.

<u>Personal characteristics</u>. Perhaps the most pronounced feature of Sorel's personality is the fact that he was, as he himself has expressed it, a 'self-taught man.' The fact that

the bulk of his social studies were carried on outside of the regular university channels tended to give his work a unique and distinctive character easily distinguishable from the work of the professional scholar. There is a freshness and an originality about his ideas and his manner of expressing them that is quite frequently lacking in the works of the professional scholars.

Sorel held the professional scholars in as much contempt as he did the bourgeoisie. However, although not a member of the professional class of scholars, there is every indication that he himself was an intellectual in the best sense of the word. He was fundamentally a theoretician and the nature of his work such that it would have been better understood in the college classroom than it was among the workers for whom he wrote. His intellectual pursuits and interests were always far removed from the fields of interest among common men, and usually far beyond their grasp. In his intensive studies in philosophy, history, sociology, and economics; in his passion for truth; in his desire to stimulate thought in others; in all of these there is the mark of the scholar. Thus despite his contempt for the professional scholar one cannot but conclude that Sorel rightly belonged to that class himself.

There can be little doubt that Sorel was a man of deep feeling often guided by his emotions, particularly when writing of his friends or enemies. His veneration of Bergson and his high regard for Pelloutier of whom he spoke feelingly, are typical examples of his deep feeling for his friends. On the

other hand, he was equally emotional in his outbursts when attacking his enemies or critics. The following examples are typical of this aspect of his personality. Of Jaurès, whom he once admired, he said that his peasant duplicity might be compared to "un merveilleux marchand de bestiaux."(9) Zola he regarded as a small mind who spoke of the workers with the stupidity of a police reporter.(10) Rouanet and Fournière he mentioned as "journalistes comme on en recontre par centaines, absolument dépourvu de cultur et n'ayant de remarquable que leurs pretentions."(11) Terms such as fool and blunderhead were very prominent in his vocabulary.

Perrin has compared him to Socrates for whom Sorel himself lacked the traditional respect. Perrin says,

> Ancien polytechnicien et ingénieur des ponts et chaussée, mathematicien et physicien de valeur, historien très au courant des travaux d'erudition les plus sévères, familier de l'economie politique dont il connaissait à fond les diverses doctrines, théologien et philosophe rompu aux discussions métaphysiques les plus abstraites, il personnifiait jusque par son aspect -- ne ressemblait-il pas à Socrate? -- le type même de l'intellectuel.(12)

Johannet has also compared him to Socrates: "Comme beaucoup de grands esprits, -- comme Socrate, qu'il abomine, -- c'est par la parole que M. Sorel a exercé le plus d'influence."(13)

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9. Sorel, RV, 108.

10. _____, Independance, 1911, 232.

11. _____, CON, 10.

12. Perrin, ISGS, 52.

13. Johannet, II, 179.

Soltau, quoting Maurice Reclus, pictures Sorel as far less provocative to his friends than the Greek sage:

> In a little shop off the Rue des Ecoles, every Thursday, a small, neatly dressed old man, with a considerable gift of the gab, put forward before the habitués of the house the leading ideas whence were to spring Bolshevism and Fascism. He was writing his name in the history of Europe, though we had no idea of it, any more than he; but it did happen that the part of the leader of the human crowd was played at least once by a retired railroad engineer.(14)

Combining the various pictures of Sorel as drawn by the literary artists, one gets the impression of a mild-mannered man, quiet in his habits, who had an interesting manner of speech that indicated his erudition and tended to lend some authority to his words. A far different picture from the keen but ferocious and truculent personality that appears in his writing. It would seem that much of the sarcastic wit and open contempt that characterized his writing was wholly lacking in his social personality.

The influence of Sorel. The direct influence of Sorel in France, particularly among the workers, was very small indeed. As a theoretician he was not in direct contact with the great masses of workers who followed the more practical leaders. This was especially true of the syndicalist movement in which there was a sharp cleavage between the the theorists and the working class leaders.(15) It was said that not half a dozen members of the General Confederation of Labor, the French syndicalist organization, had read Sorel's Réflexions sur la violence.

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14. Soltau, FPT,444,5.

15. In referring to this distinction between theorists and

The direct influence of Sorel was probably more important during his connections with the monarchist movement than during his socialist or syndicalist relationships. He was better suited to the type of tactics employed by this group than that of any of the others to which he belonged. Actually the monarchists had ceased to be a threat to France and the activities of the group during the period of Sorel's affiliation were for the most part quite harmless; this consisted of newspaper propaganda for the most part. Theoretical activities had replaced the earlier militant tactics of the group and in theory Sorel was supreme. In a later chapter it will be observed how Sorel gave

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practical working class leaders, Laidler writes:

> The theorists of revolutionary syndicalism may be divided into two groups: members of the working class and those completely identified with them, on the one hand, and intellectualists outside of the labor movement, on the other. The most prominent in the former group were Fernand Pelloutier. . . Emile Pouget. . . V. Griffuelhes. . . Georges Yvetot. . . Louis Niel and others, active members of the Confederation. . . . These working class theorists, active in the day-to-day struggle of the unions, were less interested in the mere speculative side of syndicalism, more in the methods that should be adopted in the industrial struggle if the revolution were to be brought about speedily. The principal figures in the intellectual group were Georges Sorel, Hubert Lagardelle and Edouard Berth. Their organ was Le Mouvement Socialiste, founded in 1899 by Lagardelle, a member of the socialist party. Sorel, Lagardelle and Berth, through Le Mouvement Socialiste, endeavored to supply a philosophic and sociological basis for syndicalism.(Laidler,HST, 377,8)

In every movement with which Sorel was connected this same distinction may be observed, namely, that between the practical realists and the theorists. Sorel was always numbered among the latter both in his socialist and his syndicalist relationships. Even among the monarchists whose work was for the most part theoretical, Sorel appears to have been far more a theorist than any other in the group.

some impetus to the declining monarchist organization, for the present it is sufficient to note that his influence in this group was decidedly more important than in the socialist or syndicalist groups, by reason of the fact that theory was the chief stock in trade of the monarchists during his stay with them. It has even been stated that Sorel was unknown until Paul Bourget dramatized his theories on behalf of the bourgeois.(16) However, this is clearly an overstatement of the fact that interest in Sorel's work certainly increased following his connection with the nationalistic and monarchist group.

The indirect influence of Sorel was undoubtedly far greater than his direct influence. Thus Ernest Dimnet, who detested the whole revolutionary and liberalistic tradition in France, goes so far as to say that provincialist literature, or the theories of Sorel, had a profound effect on France which is not generally realized because most people fail to take into account the fact that while no single writer achieved the dominant position of Rousseau at the end of the eighteenth century, literature as a whole was far more effective in the early nineteenth century.(17)

The most important question concerning Sorel's indirect influence is whether he was a revolutionary of the right or of the left and which movement he influenced most. The question has a heightened interest today since he has been identified

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16. Passage, MF, 610.

17. Dimnet, FHA, 199.

with the right as represented by Italian Fascism, and with the left in the form of Russian Communism. In an earlier quotation Reclus was reported as saying that Sorel put forward the ideas "whence were to spring Bolshevism and Fascism."(18) Lasserre has said in the same vein:

> Il y a toutefois deux faits qui nous donnent a réfléchir. On nous rapporte que l'illustre promoteur du <u>risorgimento</u> de la nation italienne salue volontiers en Sorel un maître de sa jeunesse, en la doctrine de Sorel une inspiration plus ou moins lointaine de son action. Et, d'autre part, on nous assure que Sorel aurait eu comme second fils spirituel, qui? Lénine. Celuici n'a que je sache, jamais declare cette filiation. C'est Sorel lui-même qui s'est flatté de cette paternité.(19)

In regard to the relationship of Sorel to Italian Fascism and to Mussolini in particular, Wagner has said the latter owes to Sorel his philosophy of action, adding with suppressed humor that this after all is the most important aspect of Fascist philosophy.(20) Mussolini has himself recognized this relationship. When asked which influence had been most decisive in his career, Nietzsche, Jaurès, or Sorel, he replied,

> . . . Celle de Sorel. Pour moi, l'essentiel était: agir. Mais je répète que c'est a G. Sorel que je dois le plus. C'est le maître du syndicalisme qui, par ses rudes théories sur la tactique révolutionnaire, a contribué le plus à former la discipline, l'énergie et la puissance des cohortes fascistes.(21)

This remark of Mussolini is all the more remarkable in view of

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18. See p. 19.

19. Lasserre, GSTI, 13.

20. Wagner, SR, 550.

21. Pirou, GS, 53,4.

the fact that his ~~own~~ rise to power had been predicted by Sorel in 1912. Variot relates that Sorel said of Mussolini at that time:

> Notre Mussolini n'est pas un socialiste ordinaire. Croyez-moi: vous le verrez peut-être un jour à la tête d'un bataillon sacré saluer de l'épée la bannière italienne. C'est un Italien du XVe siecle, un condottiere! On ne le sait pas encore, mais c'est le seul homme énergique capable de redresser les faiblesses du gouvernement.(22)

Other Fascist commentators agree on the close relationship between the work of Sorel and the Fascist doctrines. Thus M. Suckert remarks, "La nouvelle morale fasciste naît de la morale sorellienne. . ."(23) Ludovic Nadeau says, "Le fascisme est une application, dans un cadre d'intense nationalisme, des Réflexions sur la violence."(24) More practical proof of the relationship may be found in the fact that Lanzillo, official biographer of Sorel as well as his Italian translator, became one of Mussolini's lieutenants.

In the case of Lenin there is no such clear evidence that he was influenced by Sorel. Paul Seippel, in an article in Journal de Genève in 1918, stated that Lenin and Trotsky both studied Sorel's works during their stay as exiles in Switzerland and then applied his principles of violence upon their return to Russia. Sorel himself however, denied this: ". . . je n'ai aucune raison de supposer que Lénine ait pris

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22. Pirou, GS, 53.

23. _____, GS, 54.

24. _____, GS, 54.

des idées dans mes livres. . ."(25) In these words of Sorel there is also contained a refutation of Lasserre's remark, as already quoted, in which he accuses Sorel of claiming for himself the distinction of having influenced Lenin. The latter has himself made reference to Sorel in a fashion that would seem to indicate he did not regard Sorel's work with much enthusiasm:

> You are mistaken, M. Poincaré; the reception your works have received proves that there are people who <u>can</u> give thought to absurdity. To that class belongs the notorious muddlehead, Georges Sorel. . .(26)

Nevertheless there is a close affinity between the two men which will be observed in another connection in discussing the final period of Sorel's life. It is sufficient to note here that the doctrine of working class supremacy and belief in violent methods was common to both thinkers. With Lenin however, as with Mussolini, violence was not a theory, but a necessary method in revolutionary tactics.

Quite apart from the question of Sorel's influence, it would be surprising if Sorel, Lenin, and Mussolini, did not have much in common. They were all, in varying degrees, followers of Marx and actively associated with the socialist movement in their respective countries. Thus if one rejects Mussolini's claims to a Marxist heritage, on grounds of desertion, one must likewise reject the claims of Sorel whose intellectual forbears were numerous and diverse. It is quite likely that Lenin would have denounced both as traitors.

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25. Sorel, RV, 442.(eighth edition)

26. Lenin, MEC, 249.

In America and Spain the syndicalist doctrines were accepted in some degree, particularly in Spain. However, it would appear that in both of these countries the syndicalist doctrines were incorporated in too general a fashion to admit of segregating that which was peculiar to Sorel. The most that can be said is that such doctrines as were accepted by the Spanish syndicalists and the Industrial Workers of the World in America, were the product of a small group of men, the leaders of syndicalism, among whom Sorel was pre-eminent. How much of his particular theories actually became a part of the movement as a whole however, is most difficult to determine.

Summary of the chapter. Summarizing the material in this chapter on Sorel's life, the following would appear to be most decisive in influencing the trend of his thought. In regard to his family the three most important influences were the moral influence of his mother, the middle class status of the family, and the working class origin of his mother. The nature of his profession is most important since many of the technical economic studies of socialism have a peculiar appeal to the mind of an engineer. Sorel's independence of mind was no doubt the fundamental factor in causing him to associate with whatever group he pleased, and in accordance with his own beliefs. Such independence was not suited to party loyalty. While frankly recognizing the obscurity and diffuseness of his style one must also recognize that in his writing there is an original and stimulating quality. Although a self-taught man one cannot but

recognize his wide erudition. The most important influences on his thought seem to have been Marx and Proudhon in economics, Hartmann, Nietzsche, Bergson, and William James, in philosophy, and in history, Marx, Renan, the Bible, and the church fathers. Professing contempt for the professional scholar, Sorel seems, nevertheless, to have been a scholar himself and better suited to enter the professional academic world than the field of labor and political strife. It would also appear that he had very little direct influence on the workers' movements of his day but that he did influence many of his younger contemporaries in their social and economic studies and actions. If one is to judge from recent developments then it would seem that the most important influence of Sorel was that exerted on Mussolini as a result of which the latter inaugurated Fascism in Italy. The extension of il Duce's aims and methods to other parts of Europe tends to increase the importance of Sorel in this connection.

CHAPTER III

SOREL AS TRADITIONALIST

The period here characterized as traditionalist in the life of Sorel is that prior to his joining the French socialist movement. This includes the whole of his life until about 1893. However, it is only the latter part of this long period that is of immediate interest, namely, the year 1899 in which he published two of his earliest works. It is als o to be observed that by traditionalist it is not at all intended to suggest that ardent conservatism so often associated with the term, nor yet a harking back to the past, also frequently intended by this term. What is intended is simply that Sorel's thought as judged from two of his early works, is centered in classical studies rather than in the field of contemporary social problems with which his name is usually associated.

I. Contribution a l'étude profane de la Bible. During the years of his service as a government engineer Sorel seems to have devoted much time to studies and reflections rather far removed from his professional interests. Thus in 1899, three years before his retirement from government service, he published two works that were classical in content and at the same time so designed as to shed light on contemporary problems. These two

early works were Le procès de Socrate and Contribution a l'étude profane de la Bible. In both of these one finds many indications of the road that Sorel was to travel in future studies, and at the same time an expression of mild conservatism that was shortly to disappear from his work.(1)

The Contribution is chiefly of interest because it is expressive of Sorel's profound moral interests showing a concern for moral issues ~~for moral issues~~ that was to be carried over into his later more radical periods. It is principally in connection with moral issues that Sorel examines the Bible in this work. In his opinion the Bible ought to serve for the instruction of the people in order to combat both a pernicious utilitarianism and revolutionary ideas:

> L'instruction du peuple est la grande préoccupation de notre société contemporaine. On a voulu que le peuple sût lire; on ne lui a pas donné de Livre.
> Le Livre du peuple existe; c'est la Bible.
> La vulgarisation de la Bible est aujourd'hui une question sociale.
> La Bible est la seul livre qui puisse servir à l'instruction du peuple, l'initier à la vie héroique, combattre les tendances delétères de l'utilitarisme, arrêter la propagation de l'idée révolutionnaire.
> L'utilitarisme ronge la bourgeoisie autant que la plebe. On a dit que les temps héroiques sont finis. C'est pour les gastrolâtres triomphants qu'Esaie a dit: 'Malheur à la superbe couronne des enivrés d'Ephraim'. . .(2)

In the above quotation several significant aspects of Sorel's later thought are here presaged. First, of course, is his concern for the morals of the people. Second, his high

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I. Sorel's moral conservatism remained throughout his life but in later works it is hidden in a chaos of Marxist militancy.

2. Sorel, Preface to CEB.

regard for the Bible is interesting in view of his later criticism of the church despite which he never lost his fundamental respect for what he considered basic in religion. Third, the emphasis on the heroic life is constantly met with in Sorel's later work. It seems to have been this aspect of Nietzsche that interested him most. His high regard for the ancient Greek society was based on its heroic qualities of courage, military achievements, and stern discipline, and one of his chief criticisms of Socrates is that he was threatening the disruption of this society by his teachings.(3)

Perhaps the most interesting of the remarks in the above quotation is Sorel's rejection of revolutionary ideas. If one had to characterize his traditionalist period by any single idea, undoubtedly it would be in terms of this rejection of what he was later to espouse with great ardor.

In this work both Renan and Proudhon are frequently mentioned indicating that Sorel had already come under the influence of both. The latter he followed from this time on, while of the former he became increasingly critical in regard to his interpretations of church history.

It is in Sorel's other work of 1899 however, that one finds both an expression of mild conservatism and at the same time many indications of the more radical ideas that were to come to fruition under the stimulus of modern political and social issues.

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3. Johannet, II, 196.

2. Le procès de Socrate. The aim of this work is to show that the Athenians were wholly justified in condeming Socrates and that to make a martyr of him in the cause of liberty is a grievous error. According to Sorel the accusers of Socrates represented the moral conservatives who had good reason for charging Socrates with menacing society by his new doctrines:

> Anytus et ses amis crurent, en frappant Socrate, frapper toutes les écoles philosophiques, décourager les novateurs et faire revivre les idées des héros de Marathon. Ils ont échoué; mais nous devons les juger avec d'autant plus d'impartialité que nous voyons, plus clairement qu'eux, les conséquences désastreuses des nouvelles doctrines.(4)

From an analysis of the works of Aristophanes Sorel concluded that the latter was perfectly justified in regarding the innovations of the new moralists as extremely dangerous and deserving of criticism. Sorel was quite convinced that Socrates had been put to death on account of his moral and political influence rather than because of his religious doctrines. In his opinion this was perfectly just since by his teachings and its implications Socrates ridiculed paternal authority, the morals of the times, and the democratic system of government. However, above all, he was condemned because of a strong desire on the part of the government to return to the heroic morality that was being undermined by such teachers as Socrates and the Sophists. Throughout this discussion of the issues involved in the condemnation of Socrates one can detect the influence of

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4. Sorel, PS, 13.

Proudhon. This is particularly evident at two points, namely, in regard to the idea of the family as the basic unit in society and in opposition to modernism. M. Pirou has indicated that there are many points of resemblance between Proudhon and Sorel, and even in this early work one can see evidences that this is true. Pirou says,

> Souci de la chastetés, conception grave et sévère de l'amour, attachement à la famille; horreur de la vie paresseuse et facile; exaltation du travail; confiance en la valeur morale du prolétariat; programme de l'éducation technico-professionnelle, -- sur tous ces points, les deux doctrines sont d'accord. . . Critique du régime capitaliste; mépris pour la bourgeoisie; répudiation du socialisme communiste et utopique; affirmation de l'impossibilité d'une suppression complète de la libre concurrence; scepticisme à l'égard de L'Etat sous toutes ses formes, y compris la forme démocratique; négation de l'efficacité des réformes politiques; désir de sauvegarder dans le régime nouveau la liberté individuelle la plus large, sans tomber dans l'anarchie atomistique qui nie la realité se L'Etre social; enfin et surtout adhésion aux principes fédéralistes, toutes ces idées reprises, dévelopées par L'Ecole nouvelle étaient déjà en germe dans les oeuvres de Proudhon.(5)

A detailed examination of Le procès de Socrate reveals that it contained much which Sorel was later to develop in fuller form. The following are perhaps the most important of the germs of his future thought.

Sorel's moral preoccupations. As in Contribution the moral interest of Sorel is everywhere in evidence throughout Le procès de Socrate. Most striking proof of this is to be found in his critiique of the Socratic ethic. As already indicated, Sorel was convinced that the moral teaching of Socrates

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5. Pirou, PSR, 391-3.

was dangerous to the best interests of society. The reason for this he believed to lie in the Socratic conception of ethics. According to Sorel, the ethic of Socrates represented a confusion of moral and of right, a confusion he attributed to the ancients as a whole. He argues that Socrates based his ethical teaching on a judicial foundation rather than in the nature of morality itself, thereby rendering moral precepts very feeble indeed.(6) Furthermore, the ethic of Socrates, by its renunciation of the body in the interest of freedom, inspired the Stoics whom Sorel regarded as "savants profonds et hypocrites." In the life of Marcus Aurelius he saw a typical example of the error of the Socratic ethic; he failed miserably as a father and Emperor, in Sorel's opinion, because of his lack of energy and his egotistical Stoicism.(7) He seems to regard the ethic of both Socrates and the modern utilitarians as very similar, both, in his opinion, concern themselves with ends rather than with morality itself.(8) Thus he charged that for Socrates beauty was not to be considered for its own worth, but always with an end in view.(9) Sorel himself regarded art as serving a moral purpose. In all of this it is the moral preoccupations of Sorel that are most evident, indicating that he was seeking

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6. Sorel, PS, 224.

7. _____, PS, 293ff.

8. _____, PS, 317,18.

9. _____, PS, 318.

Note: Sorel seems to have based his judgements about Socrates largely on his study of Xenophon rather than on Plato although he was acquainted with the latter's works.

a moral basis for his social studies even at this early period.

Opposition to science. Sorel found in Socrates an antagonism to science and in his own fashion he agreed with the Greek philosopher. Sorel's opposition seems to be aimed not so much at science as such, but against a scientific attitude that regards science as capable of solving all problems in the world. Thus he condemned modern materialism as a typical example of the wrong use of science. This phase of Sorel's thought was later to be expressed far more vigorously when he came to question the wave of optimism that swept over Europe following the rise of the practical sciences in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The myths of Plato. In view of Sorel's own theory of myths, the discussion of the place of myth in Plato has a significant interest. He regarded the Platonic myths as natural and valuable for Plato in that they were a means of enabling the latter to express thoughts as a whole.(10) He observed that in economics and politics moderns had not given up the art of myth-making. Plato he excused on grounds of honesty, noting that he frankly confessed myths to be mere approximations to truth and not truth itself.

How far this recognition of the rôle of myths in Plato and moderns contributed to his own theory of myths, cannot be judged with any degree of accuracy. Certainly his own theory

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10. Sorel, PS, 344ff.

was not developed at this early period. However, it would appear that he was already aware of the role of myths in some phases of social development which is perhaps sufficient to establish a strong presumption that already the germ of the later theory was present in his thought.

Pessimism in the Greeks. The most characteristic feature of Sorel's later thought is also indicated in this early work, namely, his pessimism. He found in the Hellenic spirit a quiet pessimism that contrasted with the confident optimism of Socrates and the Sophists, an optimism severely criticized by Sorel, both in its Socratic and modern forms.(11) This was a preview of the philosophy of pessimism expressed in his famous letter to Daniel Halevy.

Morality and the family. In this work Sorel displays a deep concern for the future of the family, as already noted in reference to Proudhon. Sorel regarded the family as the fundamental support of social and individual morality and in his later works this high regard for the family increases rather than diminishes. Not the least of his argument on behalf of the accusers of Socrates is based on the charge that Socrates and the other innovators threatened to undermine the family by teaching the youth of Athens doctrines that bred contempt for parents and parental dignity.

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11. Sorel, PS, 217; 219.

Anti-democracy. The violent anti-democratic sentiments expressed in Sorel's later periods of his life are not paralleled in the Procès. Nevertheless, there is a very decided bias expressed, nor is it confined to Greek political life. It is undoubtedly to modern politics he referred when he wrote, "on peut se demander si les élections ne sont pas une partie de roulette malhonnête ou banquiers et joueurs cherchent à tricher à qui mieux."(12)

Opposition to the state. Both in regard to education of youth and in control of production Sorel expressed, in this early period, an opposition to the state that reminds one of his militant anti-state utterances at a later date, particularly in Réflexions. Thus he says of the state in regard to education and industry, that it is quite as incapable in one as in the other.(13) Of the state as a producer he says in this work, "l"expérience prouve que les erreurs, les malversations, le gaspillage, accompagnent toutes les entreprises de L'État."(14)

Class consciousness. Already in Procès one can detect an inclination to recognize class division in the state as a basic consideration in social problems, a consideration that was to develop more extensively under the stimulus of Marxian

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12. Sorel, PS, 186.
13. _____, PS, 179,80; 192.
14. _____, PS, 184; 386.

ideas. Thus in the Procès he attacked the constitutional plutocracy in which only the talented and the wealthy are rewarded. In such states he recognized the commercial element that strikes morality to the heart, both in individuals and in the body politic. In place of this he suggested a democracy based on work rather than on talent or wealth.(15)

Recognition of force as a virtue. Although Sorel by no means approximates the thoughts on violence that were to become so prominent in his syndicalist period, nevertheless there is an indication that he already had some ideas on the subject at this time. Thus he expresses a high regard for the heroic qualities in early Greek life and praises the Greeks for their readiness to defend their country against foreigners. It has been suggested by Cheydleur that Sorel had in mind the experiences of Frenchmen after 1870 when he wrote:

> Aristophane avait-il tort de regretter le relâchement de la discipline guerrière quelques années avant la ruine d'Athènes? Qu'un Anglais lui en fasse un reproche, cela se comprend, car ces gens, par principe, sont hostiles à l'esprit militaire. Nous autres Français, nous savons malheureusement à qoi mènent les belles théories sentimentales contre les prétoriens et le caporalisme!(16)

Summary of the chapter. Although many writers have entirely overlooked this early period of Sorel's life and writing, herein named traditionalist, from the above survey it would appear that it was most significant in two ways. First,

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15. Sorel, PS, 210,11.

16. _____, PS, 44.

Sorel reveals in it a deep concern for moral problems and appears to ground morality in terms of its own inherent value as opposed to utilitarianism. There is some indication that he realized something of the external forces affecting morals, however, his general position is apparently more concerned about the belief that morality is its own arbiter regardless of external forces. Thus he conceived it possible for the Greeks to return to the heroic days of what he considered to be a high type of morality, regardless of external changes. Socrates he believed guilty of corrupting the old moral forms and thus deserving of death. In his eyes, the Greek philosopher was not representative of a new age, but simply one of a group of perverse individuals who by their propaganda sought to overthrow the existent morality. Furthermore, in all of this Sorel revealed a mild conservatism that prompted him to decry ideas of revolution that he was later to espouse.

Second, contrary as it may appear, Sorel also revealed at this time many tendencies of thought that were later to be elaborated in more radical form in his social philosophy. These were, pessimism, opposition to democracy, interest in the myths of Plato, opposition to broad interpretations of science, the family as basic in morality, an antagonism towards the state, class consciousness, and consideration of force as morally justifiable. Furthermore, in much of this one can detect the influence of Proudhon, particularly in regard to his views of the family, the state, and class consciousness.

CHAPTER IV

SOREL AS SOCIALIST

Factors contributing to Sorel's socialist alliance. Sorel did not merely drift into the socialist movement in France. There were certain well defined traits and influences that caused him to turn in the direction of the socialists and assume the duties of defending and elaborating their theses.

I. Moral factors. Reference has already been made at several points to Sorel's deep moral convictions and it is not at all surprising that his moral sentiments should play a part in inclining him towards socialism.

That the moral life of France had seriously declined in all its varied phases since the disaster of 1870 the majority of historians agree.(1) The Panama fiasco and the Dreyfus case are but two examples of political scandals that had revealed to Frenchmen the shocking degeneracy of political life. While Sorel never mentions any particular experience of his own in connection with political corruption, nevertheless it is probably quite correct to assume that during his years as a govern-

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I. For a review of the condition of French political life and social morality during the lifetime of Sorel see Dimnet's France Herself Again, section 2. Dimnet is anti-socialist and regards socialism as one of the corrupting factors.

ment servant he came face to face with sufficient evidence to realize its presence and significance. Wagner says it was out of his civil service experiences that Sorel developed his intense hatred and contempt for the middle class.(2) Certainly public life and morals reflected the shock of 1870 as well as political life. The general public was characterized by illusions of progress, by vulgarity, and an intensive search for riches, says Dimnet.(3) To one with the moral sensitivity of Sorel such a condition could not fail to attract his attention, nor did it. In his early works many of his moral investigations of the ancients indicate, as Cheydleur suggests, that he had in mind the deplorable condition of his own country. It is quite natural then, to assume that one of the features that attracted him to socialism was its promise of a new society that would rectify all the evils of the old, including moral evil. Indeed for Sorel, the moral aspect of socialism assumed a prominent role in his thought after he joined the socialist ranks, certainly more than in the thought of many of his new associates in the party.

2. Economic factors. By profession an engineer, there was much in socialism that attracted him because of this fact. The statistical and technical elements of socialism used in the critique of capitalist methods of production and distribution are of such a nature that only one with an engineer's training

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2. Wagner, SR, 548.

3. In both of his early works, CEB and PS, Sorel condemned all of these.

can fully appreciate them. Indeed in one sense, the socialist program is far more a technical program of revising the economic bases of society than it is a political or social program in terms of moral and physical well being.(4) From this point of view it was not unnatural then, that Sorel should find in socialism something that appealed to his engineer's mind. That this was partly responsible for his turn to socialism is also indicated by the fact that he contributed several important studies to the socialist cause in terms of technical analyses of production methods.(5) That he had a high regard for the socialist program of economic efficiency in the interest of a wider distribution of goods is indicated in the following:

> . . . qu'on pourrait expulser tous les administrateurs de nos chemins de fer, de Saint-Gobain ou des mines de charbon, sans que le prix de revient des marchandises fût augmente d'un centime.(6)

3. Political success of socialism. About the time that Sorel turned towards socialism, namely, 1893, the latter movement enjoyed its first important political success. In that year the socialists obtained 600,000 votes and elected more than fifty Deputies to the Chamber.(7) Jaurès, Millerand, and Viviani, were among those elected. Again there is little

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4. It has often been noted that only one with a technical and statistical training could understand Marx' Capital. Both Stuart Chase and Thorsten Veblen are examples of men who have been attracted by the technical side of socialism.

5. Sorel, IP, 358,9. A study of the relations between the machine and the worker.

6. Sorel, IP, 278ff.

7. Laidler, HST, 367.

indication in Sorel's works as to how far he was impressed by this strong socialist showing at the polls. However, the results were so surprising that at least he must have been aware of the significance it had for French political life. Whatever inclinations he may have had in the direction of socialism at this time, surely were augmented by this dramatic circumstance. Furthermore, few beyond the ranks of socialism could see how flimsy was the bond that temporarily brought sufficient unity to socialism to achieve the 1893 electoral success.

4. The influence of Diamandy. Several biographers of Sorel have drawn attention to his liking for the companionship of enthusiastic youth. Diamandy, a Roumanian student, was both youthful and enthusiastic. In the Latin quarter where he lived in Paris, he was reputed to be a most enthusiastic follower and missionary of Karl Marx. Just how and where Sorel met him seems to be something of a mystery, but meet him he did and was soon collaborating with him in publishing L'Ère nouvelle, a review devoted to the task of spreading the doctrines of Marx in France which up to this time were not well known there. This was in the year 1892-93, the period coincident with Sorel's retirement from government service. How much of Diamandy's enthusiasm for Marx was communicated to Sorel is not at all clear, but it is clear that in a short space of time Sorel himself had become a disciple of Marx, although oftentimes an erring one. From this time on Sorel may be classified as a Marxist in his own right and reflects it in all his works.

Of the above influences, the latter was undoubtedly the most significant. Once introduced to the works of Marx, Sorel studied him assiduously and soon outstripped his youthful associate. Of the doctrines of Marx, the materialist conception of history is the one that was most influential in Sorel's thought. It is this doctrine that is most prominent in all his major works following his introduction to Marxist thought. In the light of this doctrine he developed his most characteristic beliefs concerning morals, religion, economics, and history, the germs of which had been present in his mind long before his knowledge of Marx.

Sorel and the materialist conception of history. The materialist conception of history is first of all a philosophy of history and it was in the light of this that Sorel regarded Marx. Thus he insisted that socialism is essentially a philosophy of history and Marx a philosopher of history. Thus he wrote, "Le socialisme est une philosophie de l'histoire des institutions contemporaines et Marx a toujours raisonné en philosophie de l'histoire quand des polémiques personnelles ne l'ont pas entraîné à écrire en dehors des lois de son système."(8)

By adopting the Marxian point of view Sorel was soon forced to become a defender of Marx in France since the latter was not very popular there in some circles and at the same time too popular in others. The parliamentary success of the French

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8. Sorel, RV, 61.

socialists in 1893 had made the country conscious of a new political party and much of the opposition to the party was expressed in a criticism of Marxist social philosophy. There was also a group that recognized in the doctrines of historical materialism a valuable concept for the interpretation of history, but they wished to give it a more scientific and more idealistic interpretation. Finally, there were those zealous Marxists who saw in the doctrine a complete and final answer to all the problems of human life. Against all of these groups Sorel defended what he thought to be the essence of the Marxian interpretation of history. In Ère nouvelle and Devenir social he proceeded to set forth his own views on Marx and these journals were indeed, as Sorel termed them, ". . . organes de combat."(9) His defense of Marx was also carried on in several of his Prefaces to the books of others and these perhaps provide more important material in this connection than his articles.

In regard to the opposition that Marxism aroused in France, much of it was due to a profound prejudice against everything German. Thus Valois writes,

> Pour moi, même au temps où j'étais sans réaction devant Sorel, j'étais en opposition à l'égard de tout ce qui venait d'allemagne, je n'ai jamais ouvert un livre de philosophie allemand sans me tenir instinctivement sur la défensive. . . .(10)

M. Rouanet had urged that the doctrines of Marx were

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9. Sorel, RMA, 6.

10. Valois, USA, 135.

wholly contrary to the French spirit.(11) While Sorel's criticism of Rouanet's statement is correct, nevertheless there is a sense in which it might be said that Marxism was contrary to the French spirit, namely, in the sense that French socialism had a history of its own. Babeuf, Cabet, Saint-Simon, Fourier, Blanc, and Proudhon, represented a glorious tradition in French socialist thought not easily displaced by the work of a newcomer and a German to boot.(12) Besides this there was the great tradition of the Revolution.

In the preface to Labriola's work(13) Sorel wrote, "Les theses marxistes n'ont pas été, généralement, bien comprises en France par les écrivains qui s'occupent des questions sociales." The misunderstandings of the works of Marx in France he attributed to Rouanet whom he charged with a total misunderstanding of Marx and through whose works Marx had become known at all in France. Rouanet, for instance, had argued that the theory of historical materialism was too mechanical in that it followed a strict determinism which ended in apocalyptic fashion in the destruction of capitalism which was the predetermined end of social evolution for Marx. Replying to this charge Sorel said:

> Le déterminisme suppose que les changements sont reliés entre eux d'une manière automatique, que les phénomènes simultanés forment un bloc ayant une structure obligée, qu'il y a des lois d'avain assurant entre toutes choses une <u>nécessité d'ordre</u>. On ne trouve rien de semblable dans la doctrine de Marx: les événements sont considérés d'un point de vue

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11. Sorel, Preface to Labriola's CMH.

12. This is the line of French utopian socialists.

13. Sorel, Preface to Labriola's CMH, 1.

> empirique; c'est leur mélange que jaillit la loi historique qui définit leur mode temporaire de generation. On ne demande point de reconnaître dans le monde social un système analogue au système astronomique; on demande seulement de reconnaître que l'entrecroisement des causes produit des periodes assez regulières et assez caracterisées pouvoir faire l'objet d'une connaissance raisonnée de faits.(14)

In consideration of the fact that Marx based his whole system on the dialectical process as indicated by Hegel, Sorel was quite convinced that no such strict determinism could be attached to the materialist conception of history. He believed that only distortions of the theory of Marx led to such unhegelian conclusions.

Among the distortions of historical materialism Sorel was also extremely critical of the over-zealous French socialists who in their zeal made such interpretations as warranted the criticism of men like Rouanet. In his Preface to Seligman's Economic Interpretation of History, Sorel criticized severely those Marxists who interpreted historic materialism in a fatalistic fashion and entirely eliminated all moral questions. Indeed in this same Preface he criticized Marx on somewhat the same grounds, charging that the latter had failed to take moral factors into consideration, in particular, the moral role of the family. Engels' work on the family Sorel regarded as an attempt to supply this deficiency in the work of Marx.

Despite the above critique of Marx, Sorel attributed to him a concern for moral issues that has frequently been

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14. Sorel, Preface to Labriola's CMH, 6,7.

denied by Marxist friends and critics alike. In regard to the socialist critique of Marx at this point, Sorel wrote:

> Les penseurs parmi nos socialistes n'acceptent pas sans tiraillements la doctrine desséchante du maître, d'où l'idée de Droit et de Justice est si vigoureusement bannie; c'est un vêtement qu'ils portent avec gêne et qu'ils retoucheront sans doute un jour, pour l'adapter à leur taille.(15)

And in connection with the critique of moralists outside the ranks of socialism he said:

> Les gens de grand coeur disent que l'esprit ne peut rester dans cette expectative quand il s'agit de la moral et du droit. Les critiques superficiels ne manquent pas de declamer contre l'absence d'ideal, sans se demander si une theorie ethique raisonnaible peut-être indépendante d'une métaphysique et si celle-ci signifie quelque chose tant qu'elle ne possede pas une large base scientifique. . . Faire descendre la morale sur la terre, la débarrasser de toute fantasie, ce n'est pas la nier; c'est, au contraire, la traiter avec le respect du aux oeuvres de la raison. Est-ce nier la science que de laisser de côte les rêveries sur l'essence des choses pour s'attacher aux réalites?(16)

Sorel argued that in Das Kapital Marx gave much consideration to moral problems, stating that on almost every page of this work one is faced with moral problems. He was quite convinced that the real basis of these charges was to be found in the fact that the views of Marx did not harmonize with those of his critics:

> Les appréciations morales abondent dans le Capital . . . . Quand ces deux auteurs s'accordent pour imputer un caractère amoral à la doctrine de Marx, il faut comprendre seulement qu'ils ne trouvent pas, dans le Capital, l'expression de leurs theories qui n'ont, d'ailleurs, aucune valeur.(17)

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15. Sorel, Preface to Labriola's CMH, 1,2.
16. _____, Ibid., 15,16.
17. _____, Ibid., 16,17.

Sorel's acceptance of the materialist conception of history is everywhere in evidence in those works published after his introduction to Marxist thought. In every Preface and book the influence may be easily detected. In La ruine du monde antique, Sorel added a sub-title, Conception matérialiste de l'histoire, and the work is devoted to an analysis of the Church in the fourth century in light of the economic interpretation of history. From his remarks in this work it is obvious that in applying the economic interpretation to a specific historical period, he was carefully attempting to make the application without falling into the mechanistic fallacy he had himself criticized. In La ruine he wrote:

> . . . En étudiant, d'une manière philosophique, des époques convenablement choisies, il est possible de formuler des regles de prudence, excellentes pour la pratique d'aujourd'hui. Ces regles ne nous disent pas ce qu'il adviendra, ni même ce qu'il faut faire; mais elles nous avertissent de certains dangers et nous tracent une voie a l'abri d'un certain nombre d'écueils reconnus; la route n'est peut-être pas encore parfaitement sûre, mais elle est un peu delimitee. Ces regles ne valent point également pour tous les temps; mais a chaque jour sa peine; l'essentiel est qu'elles soient utiles pour le temps actuel.(18)

It is obvious that these rules of prudence by no means imply a fatalistic view of history. Again in his Preface to the work of Pelloutier he avoided a mechanistic use of the materialist conception of history and specifically pointed out that the human mind plays an important role in history and that economic conditions are not the sole determiner of social conditions.(19)

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18. Sorel, RMA, 22.

19. Pelloutier, HBT, 5.

Despite the risk of over-emphasis it is perhaps advisable to give several more definitions of the materialist conception of history as found in the work of Sorel.

> Dans la doctrine de Marx, le point le plus caractéristique peut-être, celui qui justifie vraiment le nom de matérialisme historique, est celui-ci: le développement de chacun des systèmes fournit les conditions matérielles pour opérer des changements efficaces et durable dans les rapports sociaux, à l'intérieur desquels il s'était transformé. On sait avec quelle énergie l'école de Marx à insisté sur l'impossibilité de tenter la revolution sociale tant que le capitalisme n'est pas assez développé; c'est à cause de cette thèse qu'on a pu accuser l'école de fatalisme, parce qu'elle limite singulièrement le pouvoir de la volonté, même quand la force matérielle est au service d'une volonté intelligente.(20)

> La théorie révolutionnaire de l'histoire considère la totalité d'un système d'institutions en la ramenant à son principe essentiel, et elle ne tient compte que des changements qui se traduisent par une transformation de ce principe. Sans doute les partisans de cette doctrine ne sont pas assez naifs pour croire que le centre d'un système apparait tout d'un coup, par la vertu magique contenue dans le mot qui sert à le nommer. Ils ne croient pas davantage qu'une déclaration des droits ou même une législation nouvelle opèrent infailliblement une transmutation alchimique de la société. Ils savent que les procédés employés par l'humanité pour se transformer sont variés, complexes et obscurs; que l'on peut appliquer à l'histoire ce que Liebig disait de la nature: qu'elle ne suit jamais de voies simples et qu'elle semble dépourvue de sens commun. Les détails échappent d'autant plus à toute tentative de raisonnement qu'ils s'éloignent davantage du centre; c'est celui-ci seulement qui se prête à des considérations philosophiques sur le développement.(21)

Perhaps the definition that most clearly sets forth Sorel's conception of historical materialism is that found in his Preface to Seligman's work. Here Sorel wrote as follows:

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20. Sorel, MTP, 79,80.

21. _____, IEM, 3.

> Ne jamais raisonner sur le droit, les institutions politiques, les idéologies de l'art, de la religion ou de la philosophie sans se representer, dans toute sa réalité, la vie économique du peuple considéré avec la division historique en classes, avec le développement des procédés techniques et avec les conditions naturelles de la productivité.(22)

In this definition are found the three principal features of the social philosophy of Sorel, namely, the division of society into classes, the productive system, and the influence of the latter on general social culture. It was out of these three phases of the materialist conception of history that Sorel posited the following questions in 1897:

> Le problème du devenir moderne, -- considéré au point de vue matérialiste, -- repose sur trois questions: (1) le proletariat a-t-il acquis une conscience claire de son existence comme classe indivisible? (2) a-t-il assez de force pour entrer en lutte contre les autres classes? (3) est-il en etat de renverser, avec l'organisation capitaliste, tout le système de l'idéologie traditionelle? C'est à la sociologie de repondre.(23)

In these three questions the fundamental conclusions that Sorel drew from the doctrine of historical materialism, are set forth. The recognition of class division and consequent class struggle; recognition of the overthrow of the capitalist economic system as basic in the materialist theory of history; and the belief that such a reversal of capitalist economics also implied a reversal of the whole social culture that goes with it. This is practically a restatement of the doctrines of Marx as set forth in the Communist Manifesto and indicates that Sorel is now far more dependent on Marx than on Proudhon at this time. Certainly

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22. Sorel, Preface to Seligman's IEH, XXXVII.

23. _____, Preface to Labriola's CMH, 3.

the deductions drawn from the materialist conception of history are too specific to be attributed to Proudhon's influence, who had failed to work out such a systematic theory of history. Thus it might be said that Sorel was merely repeating the Marxian thesis as set forth in the Communist Manifesto. However, it has been noted that Sorel was desirous of injecting his own moral preoccupations into the materialist conception. How far he succeeded in this is partly the subject matter of the next section and judgement on the matter must therefore be with-held for the present.

Sorel's anti-intellectualism. The anti-intellectualism of Sorel must be taken into consideration with his interpretation of historical materialism in order to make clear his complete theory of history and in particular to clarify the relation of this theory to his moral preoccupations. It is for this reason that Sorel's anti-intellectualism is discussed directly following the discussion of his conception of historical materialism.

Despite the many protestations on the part of Sorel that the historical theories of Marx and Engels cannot be interpreted in a mechanistic fashion without violating the meaning of the authors, one is left with the impression that Sorel himself did not evade a mechanistic interpretation. Believing as he did in class division and class struggle and in the peculiar position of the working class in that struggle, namely, a revolutionary position, it would appear that he had indeed

adopted something of the mechanistic outlook on history so decried by the opponents and critics of Marx, including Sorel himself among the critics at this point. In the last analysis the Marxian concept of class struggle is the inevitable result of economic conditions over which persons have little or no control and to recognize class struggle after the Marxian fashion would appear to be falling into the mechanistic fallacy. In other words, to accept the doctrine of historical materialism in the form of a recognition of class struggle as a result of economic determinism is to adopt a mechanistic doctrine. This is what Sorel seems to have done, despite his protestation to the contrary, and by doing so, failed to conform to the standards of his own criticism. However, the real modification that Sorel worked into the doctrine of historical materialism only comes to light through an understanding of his anti-intellectualism.

By anti-intellectualism in the thought of Sorel is meant a violent opposition on his part to complete dependence on reason and rationalistic processes in attempting to understand historical data and social movements, past or present.

Like Nietzsche, Sorel believed, for instance, that the most contemptible period in Greek history was that of Socrates and Plato. In the chapter on Traditionalism, Sorel's bitter opposition to the theories of Socrates was noted. He was equally critical of Plato whose Republic he regarded as a horrible theory of government conceived by rationalistic methods and committed to the care of intellectuals to insure its

practical success.(24) In church history, the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, he saw further evidence of the pernicious influence of intellectualistic doctrines. He characterized the church fathers and theologians as algèbraistes de la religion under whom Christianity would surely have degenerated had it not been for the redemptive influence of the mystics who scorned the rationalistic doctrines of theologians and philosophers.(25) In the seventeenth century, according to Sorel, the Humanists succeeded in generating a wave of optimism on a rationalistic basis. Protestantism attempted to stem the tide of rationalistic optimism, but was itself engulfed by its persuasive rationalism.(26) Sorel also regarded the philosophy of Descartes as an intellectualistic expression which carried the method of science into the fields of social science and religion, thereby dealing the latter a fatal blow and horribly confusing the former: In his view the whole eighteenth century was corrupted by rationalism.(27) He looked upon the work of the Encyclopedists with disfavor and characterized Diderot and Voltaire as "immoraux bouffons d'une aristocratie dégénérée."(28) This rationalistic spirit of the eighteenth century was carried

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24. Sorel, PS, 183.

25. This distinction between theologians in a rationalistic sense and mystics is elaborated throughout the whole of La ruine du monde antique. Emotional zeal is here contrasted with passive rationalism.

26. Sorel, RV, 22.

27. _____, IP, 46.

28. _____, IP, 54.

over into the nineteenth century, according to Sorel, down to 1848.(29) As a result of it social reformers were dominated by intellectualistic conceptions of society that issued in utopian schemes of social reform without regard for social facts. Examples of such utopian reformers he saw in Fourier and Saint-Simon.(30)

The result of this aspect of Sorel's thought in relation to the materialist conception of history was to divest the latter of any optimism that a purely mechanistic interpretation would imply, such as a belief in the inevitability of progress. A mechanistic interpretation of historical materialism was, in Sorel's opinion, by reason of its inherent optimism, quite incapable of understanding such social phenomena as the rise of Christianity or the growth of a revolutionary working class. In the case of Christianity, Sorel believed that its success in its primitive period was due to a certain pessimistic outlook that involved the creation of myths which in turn provided the tremendous dynamic necessary to success. Such myths welded the emotions of large groups of people into a spiritual unity and thus rendered them capable of acting in a body to initiate a new social movement in face of the most difficult and most discouraging handicaps.(31) Movements of this nature and explained in this fashion are hardly compatible with the economic interpretation of history, and it was at just this point and in just this way, that Sorel may be said to have made

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30. Sorel, Preface to Pelloutier's HBT, 33.
31. Theory of myths is treated more fully in the next chapter.

his own unique interpretation of the Marxian theory of historical materialism. However, whether this completely overcomes the mechanistic objection is still doubtfull, particularly in view of the fact that although the working class might operate in a revolutionary manner on a basis of Sorel's theory of myth, the very fact that it stands in need of such myths is indicative of a deeper underlying cause of the struggle itself and one wonders what this cause could be other than the economic mechanism as pointed out by Marx. Working class myths are, after all, merely reflections of a condition that must exist before the myths can be born at all. In this connection it is quite significant that Sorel concerned himself only with the myths by which the working class was to carry out its revolution. No other types of myth applicable to contemporary situations are considered by Sorel, indicating that he had first of all accepted the notion of a class struggle based on the inherent nature of productive methods in capitalism, before proceeding to set forth his theory of myths. Similarly in Christianity, Jesus, and the circumstances surrounding his death, were realities prior to the formation of any Christian myths whatever.

In any case, the materialist conception of history goes hand in hand with the doctrine of myths in Sorel's work. In the end socialism learns from fourth century Christianity that the future is made by man and not at all the result of any mysterious development which is progressive and inevitable. In this sense Sorel may be said to have modified the theory of historical materialism, although it is by no means clear that

he was always consistent in his arguments. From this union of the materialist conception of history and the theory of myths socialism also learns that the future is unpredictable and that success comes only to those who know what they want and have the will to assert themselves. Thus one might say that for Sorel, the materialist conception of history defined the limiting conditions of social life and that the theory of myths provided the means of overcoming the limitations.

History then, for Sorel, was a perpetual fresh creation as so revealed in the anti-intellectualistic philosophy of Bergson from whom he received the inspiration for his theory of myths. Bergson himself has remarked concerning this relation:

> Vous montrez bien comment ses conceptions philosophiques(Sorel's conceptions)peuvent rejoindre les miennes par un certain coté, bien que je n'aie pas abordé la question sociale. . . . Quelques réserves à faire, en particulier, sur la Démocratie. Nous devons viser, ce me semble, à lui réinsuffler l'enthousiasme, nous n'avons aucune raison de l'en croire incapable.(32)

In regard to Sorel's use of the intuitive philosophy of Bergson, it is interesting to observe that he found the Bergsonian concepts more conducive to the study of social phenomena than the system of Comte, the founder of sociology. In the latter Sorel found a typical example of one who misused pure science by attempting to employ its methods and results in the field of social relations. He was highly critical of Comte's views on religion, saying in regard to Comte's proposed new objects of worship, "Il aurait pu tout aussi bien proposer à leur

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32. Soltau, FPT, 447. See also Perrin, IGS,24; Guy-Grand, PS; Lasserre, GSTI.

adoration la vapeur d'eau, les plaques photographiques et la Bibliothèque Nationale."(33)

Sorel's moral interpretation of socialism. Renan had noted a similarity between socialism and religion in that neither became discouraged in face of seeming overwhelming opposition. Sorel points out that Renan was wholly unable to account for this similarity. Sorel undertook both to reveal the nature of the similarity and the nature of the difference. He regarded socialism as something more than a mere political program; for him it was a preview of an entirely new world, a vision of the future , and in this sense analagous to religion. However, socialism has no metaphysics of the soul and its inspiration is dependent solely on the free activities of the human mind.(34) Although not a religion, socialism nevertheless has in it the same type of driving force peculiar to dynamic religion, namely, an appeal to the heroic in us. Only heroes possess the necessary dynamic to overcome the obstacles confronting them as in the case of the early church. The latter was much more than a school of philosophy or it would soon have disappeared; it was a society of moral heroes. The members of this society were a mighty army of saints made invincible by the belief that they were the harbingers of a new day in which all the old things would be swept away.(35) The great

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33. Perrin, IGS, 64.

34. Sorel, MTP, 198ff; 314; 352. See ch.9, Le caractère religieux du socialisme.

35. Sorel, Preface to Merlino's FES, XVII.

difficulties they faced demanded heroism, which always paves the way for great social movements as William James has indicated. But heroism also demands self-discipline and no truth is more certain than the fact that ". . . le monde ne deviendra plus juste que dans la mesure où il deviendra plus chaste; je ne crois pas qu'il y ait de vérité plus certaine."(36) Thus if socialism is not a religion, at least it will be seen that it borrows from religion its moral discipline and asceticism in the interest of a new morality.(37)

Before turning to Sorel's specific remarks on the relation of socialism to morality, it ought to be noted that in the foregoing discussion on the problem the bulk of the material from Sorel does not fall within the compass of his socialist period between 1893 and 1897. A glance at the Matériaux reveals that much of it was written about 1906, and at least, that most of it falls within his syndicalist period. This would seem to indicate that Sorel did not complete his ethical studies during his socialist period, but during his syndicalist period. That this is true will be made evident in the chapter on syndicalism. For the present it is perhaps sufficient to observe that this fact might indicate that Sorel had no real socialist stage in his thought development despite his formal relations with the socialist party.

The ethical views of Sorel that most clearly reveal his conception of the moral nature of socialism are to be found in

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36. Sorel, MTP, 199.

37. _____, Preface to Merlino's FES, XVII.

his article L'éthique du socialisme that appeared in 1899. It is to be noted again that this was after his break with the socialist party, but it is obvious that he had not yet fully developed his new syndicalist relations sufficiently to alter fundamentally the principal views on morals of his socialist period.(38) Two other articles about this same period shed light on this same problem, namely, La science et la morale and Les facteurs moraux de l'évolution.(39)

In this group of articles three phases of his moral inquiries are brought to light. In La science et la morale, he was chiefly concerned with combatting determinism; he denied determinism both in science and morals. In the other two, which are most important for this study, he argued from the standpoint of evolution and as an ardent defender of the basic moral value of the family. From the evolutionary viewpoint he argued that the principal preoccupation of social science ought to be evolution of the working class and in this discussion it would appear that he believed the future of the working class rests on evolution rather than on revolution.(40) At this time he regarded the development of the working class as conditioned by education rather than by force.

For Sorel the great moral issue at stake in the battle between socialism and capitalism was that involved in the sanctity of the family. For him all morality centered in family

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38. See collective work, Morale sociale for this article.
39. In collected work, Questions de morale.
40. Ibid., 92,3.

relations and any threat to the latter was at the same time a threat to morality as a whole. It was largely on this basis that he had justified the death of Socrates and criticized all the Greek innovators. Again in his consideration of the moral role of socialism it is the family that considered as the most basic problem. Under capitalism Sorel conceived the family to be reduced to a mere legal status between husband and wife.(41) Under socialism the essential characteristics of the family will be fully developed, namely, devotion, reciprocity, respect, and sexual union. Under the new morality of socialism divorce will disappear as the superiority of love over legal obligation becomes apparent. Alcoholism, gambling, and other social evils did not escape the attention of Sorel, but it was principally in the family and its relationships that he centered his moral sentiments and interests. The reason for this is not difficult to determine. It grew out of the beautiful relations that existed between himself and his wife which revealed to him the possibilities of the family as the basis for a new social morality. It has often been observed by his biographers that the death of his wife so affected him that he shut himself away from the world for several months.

The intellectualistic nature of the theory of natural right had prevented him from basing his moral views on it. He had seen in the morality of Socrates a juridical concern rather than a moral concern. He recognized that Marxists had noted this juridical status of the family and of all moral action

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41. Morale sociale, 138ff.

within the capitalistic framework of social life, but he was also convinced that in ridiculing this situation they had erred by going to the opposite extreme. They had come to the place where they ridiculed all moral preoccupations, emphasizing only the purely material nature of class struggle. Thus, in his opinion they reduced the ethics of socialism to a juridical status analagous to the morality of the philosophy of natural right. But juridical right will give way before historic right, Sorel argued, when the new socialist regime comes into existence. Until that time, socialists ought to pay more attention to the perfection of the moral sentiments instead of continually theorizing, because, after all, "Les plus belles théories ne valent que par leur application; le but de l'éthique est de fixer des règles pour la conduite normale."(42)

Socialism and democracy. Brief as the relations of Sorel were with the socialists of the parliamentary wing, it seems that during his relations with them there was a good deal in common between them. This is nowhere more evident than in his views on the relations of democracy and socialism at this time. He seems to have accepted the political activities of the parliamentary socialists as perfectly sound practice. In the early part of the Dreyfus case he paid Jaurès, a parliamentary socialist, one of the finest compliments that could come from him, a moral compliment. He lauded the socialist leader by saying that "la conduite admirable de Jaurès est la meilleure

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42. Morale sociale, 152.

preuve qu'il y a une éthique socialiste."(43) Again, early in the Dreyfus case, many socialists contended that since the Jewish army officer was rich and of the middle class, the class struggle did not apply in his case and that socialists ought to refrain from participation in the affair. Sorel objected to this point of view, arguing that in specific cases such as this, class amalgamation was perfectly justifiable in the interests of right and justice.(44) Johannet reports that the name of Sorel headed the list of signers to the Dreyfus petition.(45) At this time he also agreed with his socialist cohorts that anti-clericalism was a very efficacious method of propagating socialism. Although none of the above evidence is conclusive, nevertheless, it reveals that Sorel seems to have found little fault with the tactics of the parliamentarians.

There is but one positive statement of Sorel on this point of the relations of democracy and socialism in France. He had contended that their spiritual aims were the same, but in the following it is obvious that he refers to actual political action such as Jaurès and his friends were engaged in:

> . . . À l'origine le socialisme se présente comme une <u>doctrine philosophique</u> sans grande influence sur la société; -- il devient ensuite une <u>secte</u>, qui croit posséder la vérité; elle aspire à révolutionner le monde, à le réformer par la dictature, à lui imposer la pratique de programme tirés de doctrines philosophiques; la secte s'occupe peu ou point des réformes pratiques; -- enfin dans sa <u>maturité</u> il donne naissance à un <u>parti politique</u>, c'est-à-dire qu'il devient

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43. Jaurès was a firm believer in democratic methods.

44. Sorel, MTP, 177.

45. The petition was circulated among all classes in France.

> une force se combinant avec d'autres forces alliées ou antagonistes pour administrer les affaires, améliorer la législation et diriger l'État. La secte peut s'isoler; l'isolement est même une condition de sa pureté doctrinale; le parti politique ne peut ~~que~~ exister que s'il est mêlé à la vie générale, s'il est un organe dans un organisme. Le socialisme devient, de plus en plus, en France, un mouvement ouvrier dans une démocratie.(46)

Another statement in regard to the relations of socialism and democracy in Italy also indicates that Sorel was not opposed to the use of democratic methods to achieve socialism:

> Aujourd'hui les idées ont beaucoup changé en Italie: presque tout le monde reconnaît que les socialistes ne doivent plus avoir la prétention de changer à bref délai la face du monde et que leur rôle consiste à travailler, de concert avec les autres partis populaires, au triomphe de la démocratie. . . .(47)

Pirou has stated that at the time of writing in this vein concerning socialism and democracy, Sorel had not yet penetrated the real thought of Marx on the same subject.(48) However, it must be observed that Sorel was aware of the supposed contradiction with Marxist theory at this point. He specifically calls attention to the fact that Marx himself had not always opposed such alliances and changes in his thought after writing the Communist Manifesto formed the basis for the interpretation of Bernstein in terms of political methods for the attainment of socialism.(49) That there was a change in Marx's ideas on tactics is evident from the fact that during

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46. Sorel, MTP, 178,9.

47. _____, MTP, 177.

48. Pirou, GS, 22.

49. Sorel, MTP, 177. Cf. MTP, 264; 266.

the years he was in control of the International, 1868-1870, the Marxian group was the only group in favor of political action.(50) In any case, Sorel certainly sanctioned the doctrine of political alliances and democratic procedure on the basis of the assumption that socialism and democracy had the same spiritual ends in view. Thus in his syndicalist period he takes pains to refute this former belief of his socialist period.(51)

Conclusions. Summarizing the principal features of Sorel's socialist period it would seem that it was characterized by two things, his adoption and attempted modification of the materialist conception of history and acceptance of the gradualist methods of attaining socialism. In regard to the first it is not at all clear that Sorel was completely consistent in attempting to infuse a moral element into historical materialism, nevertheless he proceeded on the assumption that he had achieved this unification. In regard to the second, Sorel apparently accepted the political tactics of Jaurès and the parliamentary socialists which implied that socialism could be achieved by democratic methods within the framework of a democratic state.

Concerning the relations between Sorel's socialist period and his preceding traditionalist period several facts are to be observed. First concerning his moral interests. While moral considerations are prominent in both periods there is a

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50. The International was controlled by Proudhon's followers from 1865-67; the Bakunists controlled it from 1870 to 1871.

51. See references in footnote 49.

decided change in point of view in the socialist period. In the latter there is a recognition that external forces play an important role in social morality which point of view seems to be wholly lacking in the earlier period. This change seems to have come about by a study of the materialist conception of history which emphasizes the importance of impersonal economic factors on social culture. In the earlier period it was the false teaching of men like Socrates that threatened social morality, while in the later period it is the effects of capitalist methods of production that constitutes the threat. However in both periods it has been observed that the basis of all morality is to be found in the family. The protection of the family in the first period seems to be simply a matter of preventing corrupt influences of certain teachers, while in the later socialist period only a complete reversal of the economic basis of society can achieve adequate protection for the family. In the later period it is the thought of Marx that seems to dominate Sorel, rather than that of Proudhon.

Other features of his traditionalist period that also find expression in his socialist period are his opposition to scientific attempts to explain social relations and a more complete doctrine of class relations. The former was expanded into a complete anti-intellectualism that rejected the work of Comte as a wrong use of scientific method wholly incapable of understanding the forces at work in social change. At the same time this anti-intellectualism became connected with a theory of social myths which seems to have been present, in germ at least,

in Sorel's traditionalist period. In regard to the second, the recognition of class division, which was expressed in some degree in the earlier period, it came to full fruition in his socialist period as a result of the influence of Marx. Indeed it developed into a full-fledged socialism in which struggle between the social classes is the central theme.

The only element of Sorel's traditionalism that might be said to be denied in the later socialist period is his anti-democratic sentiments. While this was not expressed in very positive fashion, nevertheless it was an element of his earlier thought and he seems to reject it by equating socialism and democracy. It might also be said that this implies a rejection of his opposition to the state as expressed in his traditionalism. Does it also imply a rejection of force as a means of achieving political and social aims and hinted at in his earlier work? Despite his apparent approval of democratic methods it would seem that his recognition of class struggle as an actual fact was in harmony with this earlier idea of the use of force. In any case, it was not until his syndicalist period that a clear connection was established between his early anti-democratic sentiments, opposition to the state, and his approval of force, also his pessimism. Thus it might be said that Sorel was gradually developing all of the thoughts of his traditionalist period and that some reached maturity in his socialist stage while others matured in his syndicalist stage. The development of the latter will be made apparent in the following chapter.

CHAPTER V

SOREL AS SYNDICALIST

Factors contributing to Sorel's alliance with the syndicalist movement. Three factors contributed largely to Sorel's new point of view which caused him to leave the ranks of socialism and join the syndicalist movement. These were, the Dreyfus case, his study of the English trade union movement, and the influence of Fernand Pelloutier.

I. The Dreyfus case. As already noted, in 1893, about the time that Sorel first turned towards socialism, the latter had enjoyed a large measure of political success.(1) The significance of this victory loomed larger in view of the development of the Dreyfus case which broke out in the following year, 1894.(2) Dreyfus, of Jewish extraction and a captain in the French army, was charged with having delivered vital military secrets to the German government. He was tried secretly by an army tribunal and sentenced to life imprisonment. Dreyfus protested his innocence and in a few years the affair assumed gigantic proportions threatening the very existence of the state itself and at least the stability of French political life.

I. See p.40.

2. Recently dramatized in an American moving picture which failed to show the class and religious nature of the case.

Dreyfus was attacked as a Jew by the churchmen, a traitor by the army, and as an example of the failure of republican government by the monarchists.(3) The affair soon developed along class lines with the result that republicans, socialists, and anarchists, were united on the side of Dreyfus, while monarchists, nationalists, anti-semites, and clericals, ranged themselves on the other, forming the opposition.(4) The affair was suddenly placed before the French public in dramatic fashion when Zola published his famous pamphlet entitled j'accuse. The Waldeck-Rousseau ministry now constituted itself as a Dreyfus defense cabinet in 1899, inviting the prominent socialist Millerand to enter the cabinet.(5) Millerand's acceptance of a cabinet post immediately split the unity of the various socialist groups and many were now convinced that it was utterly futile to resort to political action to achieve socialist ends.(6) Out of this development came a rapid growth of revolutionary sentiment within the syndicats and many now asserted that the syndicats themselves were the sole means of revolutionizing society in terms of socialist principles. Prominent among the the latter was Georges Sorel.

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3. Robinson and Beard, OEH, 366,7.

4. Levasseur, QOIF, 21.

5. The Waldeck-Rousseau cabinet was considered by many as bitterly anti-socialist, particularly Waldeck-Rousseau and Gallifet.

6. Levasseur, QOIF, 389; 422.

2. The English trade-unions. Just as Marx had found in England much of the material which he incorporated into his system, so too did Sorel. Aided by Paul de Rousiers' study of the English trade-union movement, Le trade-unionisme en Angleterre, Sorel devoted himself to the study of the English unions. As a result he was deeply impressed with the moral character of the English form of the syndicats and his own theory of the functions of the French syndicats reflected this moral aspect. This study gave Sorel a new insight into the place of the syndicats in the future socialist society.

3. The influence of Pelloutier. The influence of Fernand Pelloutier on Sorel cannot be overestimated. Much that is now regarded as typical of Sorel was first formulated by the former prior to Sorel's entrance into the syndicalist movement. As early as 1892 Pelloutier had defended the idea of the general strike.(7) He was opposed to all socialist participation in political action; he regarded the syndicats as the nuclei of the future society; and he would keep the worker free from every institution which did not have for its immediate aim the development of production.(8) Besides this he laso believed that the future development of the working class depended to a great extent on the progress of its moral education.(9) All of these ideas are developed in Sorel's syndicalist writings more

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7. Laidler, HST, 364.

8. _____, HST, 364,5.

9. Pirou, GS, 28.

particularly in Réflexions sur la violence.

Of these and other influences contributing to the alliance Sorel with the syndicalists it is difficult to determine which was most important. However, insofar as immediate influence is concerned, probably the Dreyfus case was most influential; it seems both to have confirmed and inspired him in regard to his syndicalist theories.(10) Sorel himself remarks: "Au moment où je décidais à changer ainsi l'orientation de mon travail, commençait l'affaire Dreyfus. . ."(11) However in the paragraph immediately preceding this he says,

> . . . A la fin de l'année 1897, j'eus à étudier un livre que venait de publier Saverio Merlino sous le titre Pro e contro il socialismo; l'auteur italien s'appliquait a montrer qu'il était devenu nécessaire de réviser les bases des théories socialistes afin de les mettre d'accord avec le mouvement social auquel prenaient part les organisations socialistes; je vis alors clairement que je devais travailler en dehors de toute combinaison ayant des attaches avec l'orthodoxie marxiste. Il me sembla que la meilleure méthode à suivre était d'essayer de corriger les illusions de l'école en examinant des phénomènes observés dans le pays que le maître avait signalé comme offrant les formes classiques de l'économie moderne; j'étudiai l'enquête faite sur le trade-unionisme anglais par Paul de Rousiers en 1895; c'est ainsi que je fus amené à écrire L'Avenir socialiste des syndicats.(12)

From this it would seem that Sorel was already well on the way to a new definition of socialism in the syndicalist direction when the Dreyfus case assumed significance.(13) It is obvious

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10. Cf. Sorel's La révolution dreyfusienne, 1909.

11. Sorel, MTP, 253.

12. _____, MTP, 252,3.

13. The dramatic reopening of the Dreyfus case occurred in 1898, four years after the first trial.

that this case however, did more than merely confirm his new position. A comparison of L'Avenir with Réflexions reveals the fact that many of Sorel's detailed criticisms were derived from the unfolding of the Dreyfus case in connection with socialist participation in it. In the latter work there is a vast amount of bitter vituperation hurled at the socialists for the part they played in the affair, while the earlier work is almost wholly lacking in this respect. Thus it would appear that the new theoretical position developing in the thought of Sorel, antedates the Dreyfus case, but that many of the details, in particular his criticism of socialism, were fashioned in light of it.

Largely on the basis of the foregoing influences then, Sorel turned syndicalist and proceeded to subject to the most bitter criticism much that he had formerly believed. The nature of this criticism and the reasons for his new position, including the details of the latter, form the subject-matter of the present chapter.

Sorel's critique of parliamentary-socialism. The acceptance of a post in the Waldeck-Rousseau cabinet at once destroyed the trend towards unity among the socialist groups in france.(14) Jaurès' plan for such unity was completely forgotten.(15) The Guesdists, Blanquists, and other socialist factions, denounced the act as a betrayal of the working class.

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14. The principal socialist groups in France were the Guesdists, the Broussists, the Blanquists, and independents.
15. Jaurès aimed at the absorption of all into one party.

Briand upbraided the Guesdists for their folly in adopting the electoral method, but even this stern reproof, which Briand himself was later to disregard, was mild compared to the blistering critique of Sorel. In Sorel's critique of parliamentary-socialism however, more than a mere critique of tactics was involved; the outlines of his syndicalist doctrines were easily discerible.

Sorel's critique of socialist leaders. It has already been observed that Sorel was often swayed by his emotions to express himself in most passionate terms. Nowhere is this temperamental characteristic so obvious as in his bitter attacks on many of the leaders of parliamentary-socialism, particularly on Jaurès and Millerand. For him it was not merely a matter of mistaken policy on their part that led to what Sorel considered as a corruption of the fundamental principles of Marxism. Much of the blame he attributed to the character of the men themselves. In his eyes they were not only incapable but also corrupt. He regarded them as traitors, rather than human beings subject to error. Nor did he ever doubt that his own position was unassailable; theirs riddled with fallacies, despite the fact that he himself had once believed in the same doctrines.(16) Attention has already been called to a few of his scathing remarks about those whose doctrines he disliked and need not be repeated here.(17)

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16. Both Jaurès and Millerand belonged to a group of independent socialists that produced such brilliant men as Viviani and Jaurès himself. The parliamentary career of

17. See p. 18.

Sorel's critique of socialist utopianism. In the third section of the Communist Manifesto Marx scathingly denounced all forms of socialism that tended to be in the least utopian in outlook.(18) Similarly, Sorel's observance of socialist

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men like Briand and Viviani was indeed characterized by a growing opposition to the more radical theories and theorists of socialism. However, this by no means gives license to accuse them of treason to the ideals of socialism. Indeed it is quite obvious that whatever modification of socialist aims took place in the minds of such men, it was largely due to the fact that as political practitioners facing real practical problems, they found their former political and social theories of little value in solving real immediate problems. Furthermore, it is necessary to take into account the fact that the parliamentary-socialists had consciously adopted parliamentary methods in preference to more militant tactics. Sorel seems to ignore this in imputing low motives to Jaurès and Millerand.

In a speech at a socialist banquet Millerand himself had said, "Pour operer la transformation sociale, le parti socialiste n'emploicra pas de moyens révolutionnaires. Il lui suffit de pour suivre par le suffrage universel la conquête des pouvoir publics. . . Le programme socialiste consiste en trois points. Intervention de L'État pour faire passer du domaine capitaliste dans le domaine national les diverses catégories des moyens de production et d'échange à mesure qu'elles deviennent mûres pour l'appropriation sociale. -- Conquête des pouvoirs publics par le suffrage universel. -- Entente internationale des travailleurs.(Lavisse, HF, Vol.IX, 190. Underlining indicates Millerand's emphasis)

The socialist group in the Chamber confirmed this program by a declaration of twenty-eight Deputies saying, "Pour dissiper les équivoques fâcheuses, il déclare nettement qu'en conformité avec la pensée essentielle des socialistes de tous les pays et avec la tradition socialistes française depuis la Révolution, il entend abolir le régime capitaliste lui-même, et mettre un terme à l'exploitation de L'homme par l'homme au moyen de la conquête du pouvoir politique par le prolétariat, la substitution de la propriété sociale a la propriété capitaliste et l'entente internationale des travailleurs."(Lavisse, HF, Vol.IX, 190)

18. See CM, part III. Version referred to by writer was published by L.I.D. as indicated in bibliography. All versions seem to agree on the divisions of the work however.

participation in the Dreyfus case caused him to attack as utopian those socialist practices exhibited during the course of the affair. Indeed Sorel's criticisms so closely parallel those of Marx that there seems little doubt but that he had the Manifesto in mind when he wrote. Certainly his attitude towards social reform, the middle class, and the role of the proletariat, are typically Marxist views as expressed in the famous document of Marx. The following expresses Sorel's contempt for utopian thought:

> Celui qui a fabriqué une utopie destinée à faire le bonheur de l'humanité se regarde voluntiers comme ayant un droit de propriété sur son invention; il croit que personne n'est mieux placé que lui pour appliquer son système; il trouverait fort irrationel que sa litterature ne lui valût pas une charge dans L'État.(19)

Marx had pointed out that the essence of utopianism consists in concocting fanciful social schemes for human betterment without regard to historical and social facts.(20) In much the same fashion Sorel believed the parliamentary-socialists were busily engaged in thinking of fanciful formulas for social reform without regard for the historical and social limitations indicated by Marx:

> Les socialistes parlementaires croient posséder des lumières spéciales qui leur permittent de tenir compte non seulement des avantages matériels et immédiats recueillis par la class ouvrière, mais encore des raisons morales qui obligent le socialisme à faire partie de la grande famille républicaine. Leurs congres ~~congres~~ s'epuisent a combiner des formules destinées à régler la diplomatie socialiste, à dire quelles alliances sont permises et quelles sont

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19. Sorel, RV, 51.

20. Marx, CM, 90.(L.I.D. edition as in bibliography)

> défendues, à concilier le principe abstrait de la lutte de classe(que l'on tient a garder verbalement) avec la réalité de l'accord des politiciens. Une pareille entreprise est une insanité; aussi aboutit-elle à des equivoques, quand elle n'oblige pas les députés à des attitudes d'une déplorable hypocrisie. Il faut, chaque année, remettre les problemes en discussion, parce que toute diplomatie comporte une souplesse d'allures incompatible avec l'existence de statuts parfaitement clairs.(21)

Moreover, once departed from the strict principles of Marx, Utopians find it necessary to contradict the most fundamental principles of the master. There is soon developed in all such departures from Marxist theory a set of doctrines wholly antithetical to Marxist beliefs on the questions of social classes, the nature of the state, and the methods of attaining power. Yes, even an antithesis in the very of socialism itself.(22)

Sorel's critique of the socialist conception of class relations. That the principle of socialist tactics is essentially class war, Sorel was thoroughly convinced. However, he

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21. Sorel, RV, 105.

22. It is interesting to observe that both Clemenceau and Millerand were themselves critical of utopian theories. The former in criticizing a collectivist utopia as outlined by Jaurès, said,". . . En 1848, nous avons vu des édificateurs de société nouvelles; Pierre Leroux et Considerant se sont prononces contre la propriété individuelle que déjà, au sezieme siecle, Thomas Morus avait condamnée. Ces hommes ou sont-ils aujourd'hui? Cherchez-les; vous les avez remplacés comme d'autres vous remplaceront."

    Millerand wrote in 1903 in Socialisme reformiste, "Ces utopies sont sans inconvenients; elles peuvent même être utiles si on n'oblies pas de les tenir pour ce qu'elles sont: des oeuvres d'imagination dont la réalité modifie chaque jour la mouvante apparence."(Levasseur, QOIF,301,2)

was equally certain that the term class war had ceased to have real revolutionary significance among parliamentary-socialists. That this was true to some extent was indicated by the revisionism of Bernstein who sought to make clear the real relation between socialist theory and practice.(23) Bernstein moved in the direction of a less militant interpretation of the class war concept in harmony with parliamentary tactics of the type decried by Sorel. The latter, on the other hand, desired to reestablish the revolutionary nature of the concept of class war by investing it with a more practical and more militant fervor. He wished to regain the revolutionary spirit which he was sure had been discarded by the parliamentarians:

> Aujourd'hui les socialistes parlementaires ne songent plus à l'insurrection; s'ils palrent encore parfois, c'est pour se donner un air d'importance; ils enseignent que le bulletin de vote a remplace le fusil.(24)

Coupled with this diminution of revolutionary fervor on the part of the parliamentarians, Sorel believed there was also involved a total misapprehension of the nature and meaning of social classification; a distortion of the fundamentals of Marx on this subject. It was not a question of the number of

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23. Bernstein's work Die Voraussetzungen des Socialismus und die Aufgaben der Sozialdemokratie, was published in 1899 and argued for the evolutionary view of social development which was indeed in harmony with the methods of parliamentary-socialism as posited by Millerand in 1899. Among those sympathetic with Bernstein's main contentions were Jean Jaurès, Werner Sombart, and Masaryk, first President of Czecho-Slovakia.

24. Sorel, RV, 74.

classes in society, but rather a question concerning which particular class socialists ought to address themselves. Sorel did not himself recognize the Marxian dichotomy of social classes as binding, but insisted that Marx used this dichotomy in a purely abstract fashion for educational purposes, namely to dramatize socialism.(25) He also points out that in the work Germany in 1848, Marx had himself recognized a more diversified social stratification than that of the famous dichotomy. The real point at issue for Sorel was the fact that parliamentary-socialists were in the ludicrous position of addressing their program to social groups normally antagonistic to proletarian interests by the very nature of their place in the productive system:

> . . . Le socialisme s'adresse à tous les mécontents sans se préoccuper de savoir quelle place ils occupent dans le monde de la production; dans une société aussi complexe que la nôtre et aussi sujette aux bouleversements d'ordre économique, il y a un nombre énorme de mécontents dans toutes les classes; -- c'est pourquoi on trouve souvent des socialistes là où l'on s'attendrait le moins à en recontrer. Le socialisme parlementaire parle autant de langages qu'il a d'espèces de clientèles. Il s'adresse aux ouvriers, aux petits patrons, aux paysans, en depit d'Engels; il s'occupe des fermiers; tantôt il est patriote, tantôt il déclame contre l'armée. Aucune contradiction ne l'arrête, -- l'expérience ayant démontré que l'on peut, au cours d'une campagne électorale, grouper des forces qui devraient être normalement antagonistes d'après les conceptions marxistes. D'ailleurs un député ne peut-il pas rendre des services à des électeurs de toute situation économique?
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> Le terme prolétaire finit par devenir synonyme d'opprimé; et il y a opprimés dans toutes les classes.(26)

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25. Sorel, MTP, 188,9. This is the first indication of the theory of myths as related to Marx. Sorel says in a footnote here, "C'est, je crois, ici que j'ai indiqué pour la première fois la doctrine des myths que j'ai développée dans les Réflexions sur la violence."

26. Sorel, RV, 74,5.

It would also appear from the Marxian social dichotomy as interpreted by Sorel, namely, as a dramatic subterfuge, that he found the essence of his later theory of myths.(27) It was because of this interpretation that Sorel, like Marx, always wrote in terms of such a dichotomy despite the realistic fact that there were actually more than two classes to be considered. And again, as with Marx, he held firmly to the revolutionary view of the proletariat and rejected parliamentary methods despite his earlier approval.(28) Sorel's contempt for the middle class and its humanitarian sentiments which inclined many of its members towards socialism, was as great as his contempt for the parliamentary-socialists. Indeed there is reason to believe that he identified the two: he often referred to Jaurès as middle class in outlook and sentiment. The middle class he characterized as cowardly, stupid, and ignorant; devoid of all class sentiment.(29)

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27. See Sorel's remarks in MTP, 189ff which give full credit to Marx for the source of the theory of social myths.

28. By <u>proletariat</u> Sorel apparently means the same as Marx, namely, that class which has only its labor to sell as a means of livelihood. Sorel's term is somewhat narrower since proletariat for him generally means those workers enrolled in the syndicats. Sorel had himself observed that in the time of Marx the lack of a powerful labor union movement had prevented the latter from realizing the significance of organized labor as the vanguard of class struggle. However, this does not imply that Sorel excluded from the proletariat all who did not belong to a syndicat. It simply means that he regarded the syndicats as the organized expression of working class discontent.

29. Sorel, RV, see chapter <u>La decadence bourgeois et la violence</u>.

Sorel believed that the parliamentary brand of socialism would mean the continuation of social stratification in the event that it attained power. He regarded the parliamentary-socialists as a group of demagogues who conceived themselves to be the intellectual leaders of the ignorant masses and that once in power they would form an upper class bureaucracy not lacking in ferocity in the maintenance of their power:

> Je crois qu'en voilà assez pour ~~moi~~ me permettre de conclure que si, par hasard, nos socialistes parlementaires arrivaient au gouvernement, ils se montreraient de bons successeurs de l'Inquisition, de l'Ancien Régime et de Robespierre; les tribunaux politiques fonctionneraient sur une grande échelle et nous pouvons même supposer que l'on abolirait la malencontreuse loi de 1848, qui a supprimé peine de mort en matière politique. Grâce à cette réforme on pourrait voir de nouveau l'État triompher par la main du bourreau.(30)

> Jaurès est persuadé que la France serait parfaitement heureuse le jour où les rédacteurs de son journal et ses commanditaires pourraient puiser librement dans la caisse du Trésor public. . .(31)

According to Sorel, the parliamentary-socialists in their efforts to win the middle class to their side, were contradicting the basic doctrines of Marx while professing to stand by them. He believed himself that a revision of Marxian concepts was necessary because of new social developments, but not in the direction of parliamentary action. He believed that the middle class in Marx' day displayed an entirely different sentiment from that of his own(Sorel's)time. He pointed out that the middle class Marx knew was one that was full of

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30. Sorel, RV, 160.

31. _____, RV, 110.

courage and energy; militant to extremes.(32) In his own time however, Sorel believed the middle class to be in total degeneracy, a fact that made it necessary to revise the concepts of Marx.(33) For Marx, capitalism would be struck to the heart as a result of the evil effects on the great masses of workers of this very militancy. Now, what happens in face of a degenerate and cowardly middle class? Is it necessary to urge it to resume its former militant attitude? Not at all. No amount of persuasion can accomplish this. Nor is it any better to quiet middle class fears by selling them social peace in return for minor reforms under the threat of proletarian violence. Sorel regarded this as the method of Jaurès and his group and insisted that their role would disappear if the middle class resumed its former militancy; but true socialism cannot thus disappear. According to Sorel, the real task of socialism was to reaffirm proletarian violence which in turn would force the middle class to maintain its true relation to the workers, namely, that of

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32. Concerning the middle class in the United States, Sorel wrote: "On trouve encore aujourd'hui ce type, dans toute sa pureté aux États-Unis: la se rencontrent l'énergie indomptable, l'audace fondée sur une juste appréciation de sa force, le froid calcul des intérêts, qui sont les qualités des grands généraux et des grands capitalistes. D'après Paul de Rousiers, tout Americain se sentirait capable d'éssayer sa chance (to try his luck) sur le champ de bataille des affaires, en sorte que l'esprit général du pays serait en pleine harmonie avec celui des milliardaires."(RV, 114,5.)

33. The Dreyfus and Panama scandals were evidence of this degeneracy and corruption of the middle class. At the same time the sentiment of many middle class people on behalf of Dreyfus was indicative of a lack of militancy that revealed a deep fear of the rising working class, according to Sorel.

implacable enmity.(34) Thus the rich middle class in France would again confront a revolutionary proletariat and insure the ultimate crisis in capitalist society as so predicted by Marx:

> Non seulement la violence prolétarienne peut assurer la révolution future, mais encore elle semble être le seul moyen dont disposent les nations européenes, abruties par l'humanitarisme, pour retrouver leur anciene énergie. Cette violence force le capitalisme à se préoccuper uniquement de son rôle meteriel et tend a lui rendre les qualités belliqueuses qu'il possédait autrefois. Une classe ouvrière granissante et solidement organisée peut forcer la classe capitaliste à demeurer ardente dans la lutte industrielle; en face d'une bourgeoisie affamée de conquêtes et riche, si un prolétariat uni et revolutionnaire se dresse, la société capitaliste atteindra sa perfection historique.(35)

In this quotation is contained the essential thesis of Sorel's Réflexions sur la violence.

There are two significant aspects in the above thesis concerning the lost energy of the middle class. First its highly theoretical nature so characteristic of the work of Sorel.(36) Surely the suggestion that historical development can be made to conform to the Marxian theory of history in terms of class struggle, is a most abstract and highly theoretical procedure. Second, in attempting to find a means whereby social phenomena might be compelled to follow the paths laid down by Marx, one suspects that at this juncture Sorel himself had fallen into the pit of utopianism.(37)

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34. Sorel, RV, 85,6.

35. _____, RV, 120.

36. This type of theory was never of any value to the real practical leaders of syndicalism.

37. The only alternative to a reaffirmation of proletarian violence as a means of bringing about the capitalist crisis

Critique of the aims of parliamentary-socialism. From the foregoing review of Sorel's critique of parliamentary-socialism it is obvious that in his view the aims and methods of socialism had been radically altered, indeed had been subverted by the parliamentarians. Insofar as socialist method was concerned, it was therefore the aim of the Réflexions to reaffirm the revolutionary nature of socialism. Indeed for him revolution had become an essential feature of Marxism, i.e. syndical revolution.(38)

As to the aims of socialism, the rejection of violence seemed to him to imply a fundamental change. He was convinced that socialism had thereby become a purely reformist movement the aims of which were purely ameliorative and in the last

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predicted by Marx, Sorel thought to be a great foreign war that would bring into power men with the will to govern. However, he thought this to be an improbable development.(See RV, 110 and footnote to same page) Yet in Italy where both proletarian violence and world war played important roles, this was exactly what happened. The World War, followed by a wave of proletarian violence, was for the most part responsible for the rise of Fascism in Italy. A third factor was the personal qualities of Mussolini who was inspired by the theories of Sorel. Regardless of such developments, Sorel's views still bear the stamp of abstract theory at this point. Certainly the reasoning involved here was not based on the history and development of contemporary institutions, which for Sorel was the essence of socialism.

38. Sorel, RV, 120. It is this feature of Sorel's theories that has given rise to the statement that he was a left wing revisionist in contrast to the revisionism of Bernstein which is considered as right wing revisionism.
In view of Marx' later turn to political action, it might also be said that Sorel was more revolutionary than Marx himself.

analysis wholly reactionary:

> Aujourd'hui, nous voyons que cela pourrait fort bien arriver: les amis de Jaurès, les cléricaux et les démocrates placent leur idéal de l'avenir dans le Moyen Age: ils voudraient que la concurrence fût tempérée, que la richesse fût limitée, que la production fût subordinée aux besoins. Ce sont des rêveries que Marx regardait comme réactionnaires et par suite comme négligeables, parce qu'il lui semblait que le capitalisme était entraîné dans la voie d'un progrès incoercible; mais aujourd'hui nous voyons des puissances considérables se coaliser pour essayer de réformer l'économie ~~economie~~ capitaliste dans le sens médiéval, au moyen de lois. Le socialisme parlementaire voudrait s'unir aux moralistes, à l'Église et à la démocratie dans le but d'enrayer le mouvement capitaliste; et cela ne serait peut-être pas impossible, étant donnée la lâcheté bourgeoise.(39)

It was on the basis of the foregoing critique of parliamentary-socialism and its leaders that Sorel set forth a new interpretation of socialism that carried him into the ranks of the syndicalists. This critique of the parliamentarians is at the same time a clue to his syndicalist theories which are a positive affirmation of all that he found lacking in the orthodox and revisionist forms of socialism. Indeed in his work as a whole, the positive affirmations on syndicalism are but the affirmative statement of his negative critique of socialism: the former grows out of the latter.

<u>The syndicats</u>. In France, worker's syndicats had existed prior to 1884, but it was only in that year that they were legalized.(40) As in England, they were formed by workers whose economic and social well-being was governed by the

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39. Sorel, RV, 121,2.

40. Levasseur, QOIF, 715.(See 718 for beginning of syndicats)

same particular branch of the productive system.(41) Syndicats existed in nearly all the major trades. The essential bond of union was economic. Their point of origin was also quite naturally a spontaneous one, namely, the reactions of working men and women to the worst features of nineteenth century industrialism; long hours of labor, low wages, poor working conditions, and lack of security in terms of steady work throughout the year. The formation of syndicats was essentially an attempt on the part of the workers to remedy the above evils in the various trades on which their livelihood depended. Thus in the beginning the syndicats were not of a political nature at all. As their membership increased under the stimulus of nineteenth century industrial conditions, their political importance assumed increasing proportions with the result that all political groups coveted their friendship and control. As a means to this end members of various political groups were urged to join the syndicats and try to win them over to the side of particular political interests. As a result the syndicats at various times came under the influence of different political parties. However, being essentially economic in nature, they generally maintained an independent position in politics, choosing to support those whom they believed favorable to their cause.(42)

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41. Examples of such syndicats were those in the fields of mining, textile industry, and printing.

42. Similar to the present policy of the <u>American Federation of Labor</u>.

Economic conditions gradually forced the various syndicats to come together into more centralized organizations with the result that general associations comprising a number of local syndicats were soon developed. The most important of these general confederations were the Fédération nationale des syndicats, the Fédération des bourses du travail du France, and the Confédération générale du travail.(43)

The principal issue that soon developed in the conventions of the above bodies was the problem of tactics capable of winning concessions from employers. Under socialist leadership the political aspect had been given much consideration, but gradually there developed a decided trend in the direction of economic action using the weapon of the strike. From the idea of local strikes against individual employers there gradually appeared the concept of a general strike that would paralyze all industry at the same time and there-by be more effective in coercing employers. In the struggle over tactics gradually a majority of workers recorded themselves in favor of the general strike which proved to be a severe blow to socialist leadership in the syndicats.(44) The most radical steps in the direction of economic rather than political action, was taken by the C.G.T. and it was in this group that the germs of revolutionary syndicalism were nurtured. It was to provide a

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43. The Fédération nationale des syndicats was founded in 1886; the Fedération des bourses du travail in 1892; the Confédération générale du travail(C.G.T.)in 1895.

44. Laidler, HST, 363.

philosophical and sociological basis for this group, the C.G.T. that the intellectual work of Sorel, Lagardelle, and Berth, was carried on.

The revolutionary role of the syndicats in Sorel's schema. Sorel had criticized the parliamentary-socialists for their demagogic aims in relation to the proletariat; he was convinced that the role they had asked the latter to play was simply that of securing the election of socialists who would form a political bureaucracy. The proletariat as organized in the syndicats, appeared in an entirely different light to Sorel. He saw in them the immediate means of fulfilling the predictions of Marx concerning the historic role of the working class in terms of revolutionary action. He believed that the syndicats embodied the very essence of Marxism by the nature of their place in the productive system and their class solidarity. First, he recognized that in the syndicats there was developed a keen consciousness of working class solidarity and he says that ". . .l'ensemble des travailleurs forme un corps; les intérêts de tous sont solidaires; nul ne peut abandonner la cause de ses camarades sans être considéré comme un traître."(45)

Sorel also saw in the syndicats proof of the Marxian thesis that capitalism, by the very nature of its inherent laws of development, would throw the working class into revolution-

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45. Sorel, MTP, 102.

ary organizations.(46) Such organizations he conceived the syndicats to be and he desired to swing them far to the left to fulfill the Marxian prediction. Thus when he wrote that ". . . tout l'avenir du socialisme réside dans le développement autonome des syndicats ouvriers." it must be kept in mind that he has harmonized the development of the syndicats with revolutionary Marxism.(47)

In harmony with this view of the syndicats, Sorel set forth his theories of syndicalism for the guidance of the syndicats in the struggle for socialism.(48) He conceived class war to be the basic principle of socialist tactics, but in the new conditions created by the growth of the syndicats it was to be much more meaningful and direct than heretofore; also much more violent.

Direct action. The most fundamental aspect of the syndicats that impressed Sorel was the fact that by means of them the workers were brought into a direct struggle with their employers without recourse to intermediaries. He saw the worker brought into direct contact with the opposition that he was striving to overcome.(49) The introduction of the method of

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46. Sorel, MTP, 133.

47. _____, RV, 94,5.

48. Sorel usually referred to the future state that was to be be ushered in by syndicalism as socialism, not as might be expected, syndicalism.

49. Sorel, RV, 94,5.

direct action Sorel attributed to the influx of anarchists into the syndicats.(50) It is for this reason that he always held Pelloutier in such high esteem.(51) Sorel compared this influx of anarchists into the syndicats to the Protestant Reformation: the former saved socialism from middle class deviation; the latter saved Christianity from Humanism.(52)

Despite the fact that direct action is usually connected with the name of Sorel it is obvious from the above that he simply made use of a concept that was already in use among many leaders of the workers.

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50. This anarchist influx into the syndicats took place principally in the Fédération des bourses du travail which from 1894 until 1902 was the most important syndicat organization in France. It was in the local bourses that syndicalist ideas first became accepted. The more radical C.G.T. after frequent clashes with the former, finally amalgamated with it in 1902 and the former was soon swallowed up by the C.G.T. which from that time on represented the main body of French syndicalism.

51. Pelloutier had an anarchist-communist background and carried his ideas into the Fédération des bourses which he served as secretary from 1893 until his death in 1901, just a year before the amalgamation with the C.G.T. Sorel's regard for him seems to rest on the fact that Pelloutier carried into the syndicats three elements of social philosophy which he himself accepted, namely, to oppose economic action to political action on behalf of the workers; that the workers free themselves from every institution that had not production as its main purpose; and that the bourses were to be regarded as the nuclei of the future society. This was the very essence of Sorel's credo and was first clearly stated by Pelloutier.
It is not to be wondered at then, that Sorel paid such compliments to Pelloutier.

52. Sorel, RV, 57.

Sorel and violence. Definitely committed to the use of violence, Sorel presented a justification of his position in a most unique fashion. In his theory two distinct types of violence may be distinguished. First there are those acts of savagery which were attached to the eighteenth century attitude towards the state. In accordance with the philosophy of natural law, men of the eighteenth century concluded that a return to the fundamental principles of truth, goodness, and justice, must be carried out through the centralized power of the state which was conceived as limitless in its powers of enforcement.(53) Such a view of the state, in Sorel's opinion, naturally justified the employment of terroristic methods; those acts of savagery characteristic of the French Revolution. He regarded acts of violence of this type as manifestations of middle class violence and not of proletarian violence. Thus in the French Revolution Sorel insisted that it was the middle class element that proved most savage in its reprisals against its enemies.(54) This feature was characteristic of all middle class revolutions according to Sorel.(55)

The second type of violence recognized by Sorel he conceived to be utterly different from that just noted. He believed that the development of capitalism had displaced the former worship of the Dieu-État and had replaced it with new

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53. Sorel, RV, 150,1.

54. _____, RV, 152.

55. Sorel means the revolutions by which the industrial class freed itself from the political restraints of feudalism.

confidence in the powers of the individual.(56) This individualism developed by virtue of nineteenth century industrialism and the place of the proletariat in the scheme of production, did not reject violence as a means of attaining its ends, but it was of such a nature that it rendered null and void the idea of violence associated with middle class revolution. The violence of the proletariat Sorel conceived to be utterly different from that manifested in the revolution of '93 for instance:

> Les violences prolétariennes n'ont aucun rapport avec ces proscriptions; elles sont purement et simplement des actes de guerre, elles ont la valeur de démonstrations militaires et servent à marquer la séparation des classes. Tout ce qui touche à la guerre se produit sans haine et sans esprit de vengeance; en guerre on ne tue pas les vaincus; on ne fait pas supporter à des êtres inoffensifs les conséquences des déboires que les armées peuvent avoir éprouvées sur les champs de bataille; la force s'étale alors suivant sa nature, sans jamais prétendre rien emprunter aux procédures juridiques que la société engage contre des criminels.(57)

Thus proletarian violence was conceived by Sorel as wholly lacking in the spirit of savagery and vengeance, qualities peculiar to all middle class revolutions. This was the essence of the distinction he made between proletarian and middle class violence; the distinction between violence and <u>force</u>. Force he conceived to be the typical middle class savagery in times of revolution. However, there was also attached to the distinction a political connotation. Thus he argued that force was the means of imposing the will of a minority in the social

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56. Sorel, RV, 143,4.

57. _____, RV, 161.

order, while violence was the means of destroying a social order controlled by a minority:

> . . . Je suis d'avis qu'il y aurait grand avantage à adopter une terminologie qui ne donnerait lieu à aucune ambiguïté et qu'il faufrait réserver le terme violence pour la deuxième acceptation; nous dirions donc que la force a pour objet d'imposer l'organisation d'un certain ordre social dans lequel une minorité gouverne, tandis que la violence tend à la destruction de cet ordre. La bourgeoisie a employé la force depuis le début des temps modernes, tandis que le proletariat réagit maintenant contre elle et contre l'État par la violence.(58)

In view of this distinction then, class war was conceived by Sorel as carried on in the spirit of militarism with no thought of hatred and revenge, but simply as two opposing armies in a campaign: that of simple and direct struggle for mastery. Conceived in this fashion, Sorel was convinced that proletarian violence was therefore a refinement of the nature of violence. He wrote: ". . . la notion de lutte de classe tend à épurer la notion de violence."(59) Thus he concluded that savagery would not accompany proletarian violence, saying:

> Nous avons le droit de conclure de là que l'on ne saurait confondre les violences syndicalistes exercées au cours des grèves par des prolétaires qui veulent le renversement de l'État avec ces actes de sauvagerie que la superstition de l'État a suggérés aux révolutionnaires de '93, quand ils eurent le pouvoir en main et qu'ils purent exercer sur les vaincus l'oppression, -- en suivant les principes qu'ils avaient reçus de l'Église et de la royauté. Nous avons le droit d'espérer qu'une révolution socialiste poursuivie par de purs syndicalistes ne serait souillée par les abominations qui souillèrent les révolutions bourgeoises.(60)

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58. Sorel, RV, 256,7.

59. _____, RV, 162.

60. _____, RV, 165,6.

Sorel's view of the state. Sorel's view of the state was in harmony with his analysis of violence at the point where he believed the state entered into the problem of violence. He regarded the new era of individualism as a complete refutation of the eighteenth century view of the state. The syndicats for him were the expression of this new individualism and it is significant that direct action implied that among those intermediaries excluded from the struggle bewteen capital and labor, the first and foremost was the state. It will also be observed that this attitude towards the state involved his critique of parliamentary-socialism at this point. The parliamentarians, in his opinion, were merely attempting to capture the state for their own purposes when what was really required was to strip the state of all its powers which it uses so ruthlessly. The real task of socialism was therefore an attack on the state. In this attitude towards the state one can again detect the influence of Proudhon and it is quite significant that in his longest work on Proudhon, the central problem is that of the state.(61) Indeed Sorel's whole individualistic outlook is a reflection of Proudhon with whom he agreed in his repudiation of a communistic socialism.(62)

The syndicalists did not propose to follow the tactics of Jaurès in their dealings with the state, namely, to make it serve the role of social reformer by means of compulsion.

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61. Sorel, MTP, Exégèses proudhoniennes. Appendix on 415ff.
62. See quotation from Pirou p.31, in which this mentioned.

According to Sorel, syndicalism was devoted to the task of destroying the state: "Les syndicalistes ne se proposent pas de réformer l'État comme se le proposaient les hommes du XVIIIe siècle; ils voudraient le détruire."(63) Thus did the thought of Sorel at this point harmonize with the anti-patriotism of the Communist Manifesto.

With the elimination of the state as an intermediary between worker and employer one is faced with the problem of the specific nature of direct action, namely, what kind of direct action is the best calculated to succeed? For Sorel, as for most of the syndicalist group, there was but one answer to this problem---the general strike! The smaller strikes had turned out to be surprisingly successful and it is not to be wondered at that the workers should gradually realize the potential power they held in their hands if a general strike could be organized throughout the entire country. This idea had long been discussed and was far from losing its interest for the workers. In the syndicalist ranks the idea had been particularly popular and it is not surprising that Sorel should adopt it, particularly in view of the fact that Pelloutier, whom Sorel admired so much, advocated it strongly. It was in the discussion of the concept of the general strike that Sorel made his most original contribution, namely, his theory of social myths, and thus before turning to the general strike itself it is perhaps advisable to examine what Sorel meant by social myths.

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63. Sorel, RV, 163.

The nature of social myths. Examples of social myths have already been referred to in the chapter on Sorel's socialist period, however, it is perhaps advisable to give further exemplification as an introduction to a more detailed consideration of the theory of myths. The belief of the early Christians in the second coming of Christ is one of the examples that Sorel frequently used in illustrating his theory. According to him the principal reason for the success of early Christianity was this belief in the speedy return of Christ to overthrow evil and establish goodness and justice. Under the stimulus of such an idea the emotions of the early Christians were so aroused that they became invincible and swept all before them; Christianity was established largely on the basis of this all-conquering enthusiasm, aroused by faith in the belief that Jesus would return soon. It made no difference that time passed without the looked-for event actually taking place: truth and falsity have nothing to do with such myths according to Sorel. They depend for their effects on the affective life and not on their rationality. Thus it is evident that they are primarily a spur to action in terms of a body of images that stimulate the sentiments:

> Il faut juger les mythes comme des moyens d'agir sur le présent. . .(64)
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> . . . c'est-à-dire une organisation d'images capable d'évoquer instinctivement tous les sentements.(65)

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64. Sorel, RV, 180.

65. _____, RV, 182.

One can say then that myths are stimulants to action on the basis of images that call forth certain sentiments. As already indicated, the question concerning the truth or falsity of a myth is quite superficial according to Sorel. Thus concerning the belief of the early Christians in the speedy return of Jesus and the resultant overthrow of the pagan world, Sorel remarks as follows:

> La catastrophe ne se produisit pas, mais la pensée chrétienne tira un tel parti du mythe apocalyptique que certains savants contemporains voudraient que toute la prédication de Jésus eût porté sur ce sujet unique.(66)

For Sorel, the way in which man can overcome the present without reasoning about the future, is through the medium of social myths. By means of these "constructions d'un avenir indéterminé dans les temps" immediate action is induced and this was the essential thought behind Sorel's application of the theory of social myths to the idea of the general strike.

Actually the idea of social myths may be applied to a wider area of social and historical interpretation than Sorel considered. He applied it principally in two fields, namely, church history and working class development. In the former he attributed much of the success of Roman Catholicism to the use of myths. He also saw in Calvinism a good example of the use of myths. Attention has already been drawn to their use in early Christianity.(67) It was in the exemplification of the use of myths in historical Christianity that Sorel also

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66. Sorel, RV, 178.
67. Sorel, material in Letter to Daniel Halevy in RV.

developed his pessimism which has been observed as one of the elements of his traditionalist thought.(68) According to Sorel there was always present in a social myth a certain degree of pessimism which aided calling forth supreme efforts, as in the case of myths of the Roman Catholic Church. The latter always conceived of itself as engaged in a life and death struggle with the forces of evil and although the forces of goodness were on the side of the former, a gigantic struggle ensued in which only by means of tremendous efforts would the victory be assured for the church. This despite the fact that the forces of God were bound to win in the end; in this case the Roman Catholic Church. According to Sorel, historians overlook the tremendous historical importance of this pessimism of action as contrasted with the ordinary type of metaphysical pessimism. It is this type of pessimism, a pessimism of action calling forth supreme efforts and sacrifices, that constitutes the inner essence of great social movements.(69)

Of Sorel's use of the social myth in connection with the working class, more will be observed in the following chapter. For the present it is sufficient to observe that the theory of social myths was capable of a much wider application than Sorel gave to it. In the field of secular history he does refer to a few examples such as the unselfish sacrifice of the soldiers of Napoleon. However, in general it must be said that Sorel did not apply the theory as widely as it seems possible to do.

68. See p.34.
69. Sorel, RV, 17-19ff.

The general strike as a social myth. By applying the theory of social myths to the idea of the general strike, Sorel believed that he had removed from the latter all the problems attendant upon the possibility of it ever taking place, a problem that had led to numerous controversies within the syndicats. Sorel argued that just as the truth or falsity of the second coming of Christ had nothing to do with the efficacy of this conviction in producing a great religious and social movement, so too the question of the possibility of the general strike ever occurring had nothing to do with the problem.(70) It is sufficient, he maintained, that as a myth this idea is capable of calling forth the sentiments of the working class and encouraging them in their fight for emancipation. Myths are necessary to every revolutionary movement and the general strike is the myth of the revolutionary proletariat, he insisted. It inspires hope, provides the immediate stimulant to action that all great social movements have possessed, and it keeps socialism ever young.

This theory of Sorel actually received scant attention from his colleagues in syndicalism. They were interested in real strikes, not possible or ideal strikes. This is further evidence of the small influence Sorel had on the syndicalist movement as a whole. Again, the theory of social myths is too often over-emphasized in Sorel's work which presented other features of equal, if not of greater importance. Certainly in his monarchist relations it was not this theory that seems to

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70. Sorel, RV, 180-185.

have been most acceptable to Maurras and his friends, and in terms of actual personal influence and practical use of his doctrines this was his most influential period. Nor did Mussolini mention the doctrine when paying tribute to Sorel. For both Mussolini and Maurras it was the theory of direct action that was most acceptable.

The economic and moral role of the syndicats. In harmony with Marx in regard to the recognition of the value of capitalist technique in production, Sorel was convinced that the training of the workers in the capitalist workshops was one of the most fundamental aspects of the syndicats. Every effort ought to be directed to the end of increased production, a view held generally by all syndicalists. The reason for this is obvious, since in the future socialist society the syndicats would be charged with the task of production of necessary goods for consumption. Indeed this over-emphasis on the producer to the neglect of the consumer is one of the principal criticisms socialists have made of syndicalist theory. Sorel had the producer point of view uppermost in his mind, so much so that he opposed the eight hour day proposals and all forms of industrial sabotage.(71)

While recognizing the value of immediate amelioration of proletarian needs in terms of cheaper and better food and clothing, Sorel was nevertheless opposed to cooperatives. In the first place he disliked their democratic tendencies, a

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71. Perrin, IGS, 96.

characteristic feature of the cooperative movement.(72) And in the second place, he believed that since their principal aim was not that of urging the proletariat to transform the capitalist world, they were therefore of little ultimate value.(73)

The general vagueness of the syndicalist view of the exact nature of the future social order they proposed to usher in does not allow of a detailed exposition of economic processes under the control of the syndicats. Like the average syndicalist in this respect, Sorel's views were no more enlightening at this point. The principal contention is simply that the methods of production in a socialist society will be under the control of the syndicats.

In regard to his moral preoccupations during his syndicalist period, Sorel arrived at a far more practical point of view than had heretofore characterized his moral inquiries. It is not so much that he has given up the more metaphysical aspects of his ethics, but that his principal outlook at this time was that of determining the agencies whereby moral teaching might be imparted to the workers. Such an agency he found in the syndicats. Indeed in his reading of de Rousiers' work on the English trade-unions he had noted the moral influence they exerted on their members; many had given up strong drink after joining the English unions.(74) And in reply to Durkheim

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72. Sorel, IEM, 172.

73. _____, IEM, 124.

74. _____, MTP, 129.

who was seeking an agency capable of putting a stop to moral degeneration, Sorel called his attention to the syndicats.(75)

In Sorel's syndicalism the economic and moral roles of the syndicats were thus conceived as going hand in hand, a view which Pelloutier had advanced much earlier than Sorel. Thus when in dealing with Sorel Laidler remarks that he thought the main task of syndicalism to be the training of the workers in capitalist workshops to develop their capacities, it must also be observed that this implied both technical and moral capacities. For him economic and moral discipline went together and both were to be developed through the syndicats. This emphasis does not imply that Sorel had ceased to view the family as the basic dispenser of morals; there is no indication that he ever contrasted the two. Near the end of L'avenir socialiste des syndicats he does make reference to the relation of women and children in the syndicats, but not in such a way as to imply any antagonism between the syndicat and the family. Indeed he seems rather to regard the syndicat as a bolster of family life and family morality.(76) What is intended here by emphasizing the moral role of the syndicats in relation to their economic role, is simply to show that in his syndicalist period he found a practical expression for his ethical theories, namely the syndicats.

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75. Sorel, MTP, 127.

76. _____, MTP, 130.

Conclusions. If Sorel's socialist period represented his immediate reactions to his introduction to the work of Marx his syndicalist period would seem to represent the results of further reflection on the proper interpretation of Marx in the light of the Dreyfus case and the growth of the syndicats. The former convinced Sorel of the futility of interpreting Marx in terms of parliamentary methods. The second convinced Sorel of the practical possibilities of revolutionary class struggle by means of the syndicats. Thus his syndicalism essentially represented a revolutionary interpretation of Marxism. It is for this reason that he is frequently referred to as a Neo-Marxist and Sorel often observed that his own work was simply a continuation of that of Marx in light of the growth of the syndicat movement since the time of Marx.

In connection with the preceding periods of Sorel's life as dealt with in the foregoing chapters, several interesting features may be noted. First, in relation to his socialist period. The most important consideration to be observed is that Sorel as a syndicalist completely rejected the democratic point of view which he had held while a socialist. This also implied a rejection of the state as the organ of social reform which Jaurès conceived it to be. As a socialist, the overthrow of capitalism appeared to him principally as the downfall of capitalist political life from which result would also come the downfall of capitalist economic life. Socialist control of the state would insure this economic reversal. However, as a syndicalist, he conceived that the reversal of capitalist economy

would result not from the capture of the state by socialism, but by the destruction of the state by syndicalism.

Second, in regard to the relations of his syndicalist and traditionalist periods, several elements that had appeared in his traditionalism remained unexpressed during his socialist relations, but were reaffirmed in his syndicalist writings. Perhaps the most important of these was his anti-democratic views. This anti-democracy which was barely hinted at in his first works as a traditionalist became one of the most characteristic features of his syndicalist theory. Similarly, his pessimism was expressed in the earliest period, almost wholly lacking in his socialist writings, and reappeared stronger than ever in his syndicalist works. The hint in his traditionalism that violence might be justifiable was also ignored in the middle period, but became the cornerstone of his syndicalist philosophy. The theory of myths, which was developed in his syndicalist writings reflects his traditionalist interest in the Platonic myths and his suspicion of scientific rationalism as a means of solving social problems. However, this was also expressed to some extent in the anti-intellectualism of his socialist period. The opposition to the state which he touched on in his traditional writing was denied in his socialist stage and reaffirmed with more emphasis than ever in his syndicalist works. Sorel's recognition of class division covered all three periods of his thought thus far, but seems to have become more pronounced in his syndicalist period.

Sorel's moral preoccupations covered all three periods, however a development may be observed in this connection. As a traditionalist he seems to have been largely unaware of the external factors influencing morality which is clearly recognized when as a socialist he relates morals and the materialist conception of history. Finally, as a syndicalist, he seems to affirm a close relation between morality and economics by regarding the syndicats as the centers of both the economic and the moral life.

Finally, it ought to be kept in mind that Sorel did not create syndicalist theory as might be judged from numerous writings on Sorel and syndicalsim. For the most part his syndicalist views were accepted as basic long before Sorel entered the movement. Pelloutier had far more to do with the formation of syndicalist social philosophy than Sorel. The most original doctrines that Sorel carried into the syndicalist movement were his theory of social myths and his justification of violence both of which created no changes in the fundamentals of syndicalism. Furthermore, these two doctrines were of such an abstract nature that few syndicalists troubled to read them, which is indicative of the wide gap that existed between the theoretical work of Sorel and the practical problems of the workers and their leaders. Seemingly it was this highly theoretical nature of Sorel's work that prevented him from exerting any significant influence on syndicalism as a whole.

CHAPTER VI

SOREL AND THE MONARCHISTS

Sorel breaks with syndicalism. During the years of his syndicalist relations Sorel really believed that his works interpreted the essence of the syndicalist movement. Actually there had always existed a wide divergence between his scholarly studies and working class actualities. For the most part the rank and file of syndicalists knew nothing of his work nor were they interested in theoretical justifications of syndicalist action. They were principally concerned with achieving immediate results in terms of higher wages, better working conditions, and adequate worker's pensions. Many of these were former anarchists, who, if they held to a social philosophy at all, believed in doctrines radically different from those of Sorel. Pirou says of the syndicalist group:

> . . . ils se représentaient la société de l'avenir sous une forme très optimiste et rêvaient d'un état social que caractériseraient, dans l'ordre économique, la diminution du travail, l'abondance des richesses, la facilité de consommation et, dans l'ordre moral, le liberté des relations sexuelles et l'affranchissemant de la femme.(1)

From what has been observed heretofore concerning the pessimism

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I. Pirou, GS, 37.

and moral tendencies of Sorel, it is obvious that there was nothing in common between the ideas of these anarcho-syndicalists and his own. It was a far cry from the basic material considerations of the former and the moral aims of Sorel who had cried that the world will become more just only as it becomes more moral. Thus when the syndicats adopted sabotage methods in their struggle against their employers, Sorel, who had always opposed indiscriminate violence, protested against it, but without effect.

In the field of tactics a wholly different attitude appeared on the part of the syndicalists that was equally reprehensible to Sorel. A maturer syndicalism recognized the value of cooperation with other groups and there appeared a tendency to cooperate with the socialists in the interest of immediate working class reforms. This was a shocking turn of events for Sorel who had been the bitter enemy of all democratic action in terms of party cooperation. Thus in 1908 he broke with Lagardelle who was himself an intellectual in the syndicalist ranks, and in 1910 Sorel announced that syndicalism had not come up to his expectations: "Il me semble que syndicalisme n'a pas realisé ce qu'on attendait de lui."(2) There is also a hint that Sorel was losing his taste for militant action as he grew older. Thus in Confessioni he wrote as follows in this

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2. Johannet, II, 204.

connection:

> Je me sens trop vieux pour attendre des espoirs lointains et j'ai résolu d'employer les années dont je puis encore disposer à approfondir d'autres questions qui intéressent vivement la jeunesse française.(3)

But Sorel's work was not yet finished and by a peculiar combination of circumstances he was drawn into another movement marking another phase of his career, namely, into the French monarchist movement which, under the auspices of the Action Française, sought a restoration of the hereditary monarchy.(4)

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3. Johannet, II, 205.

4. Soltau's sketch of the monarchist group is here quoted in part since it suggests many differences and similarities in relation to Sorel's doctrines.
"The neo-traditionalism of the three B's -- Brunetière, Bourget, Barrès -- was more of a philosophy, a doctrine, an attitude towards life than a political system ready for immediate application, and the Ligue de la Patrie française, of which they were the founders, was more of a grouping of the like-minded from different camps than an army ready to enter the political fray. Formed in January 1899, under the leadership of a number of members of the Academy who wished to show that the intellectuals were not all on the side of Dreyfus, the Ligue itself did not live very long: it was too vague in its declarations, too heterogenous in its membership, to carry much weight. Its collapse after the elections of 1902 showed the need for a more definite programme, expressed by some homogenous organization capable of effective intervention in public affairs. The formation both of this programme and of this organization was the work of Charles Maurras.
"The nucleus of this new group were known by this sign: that they were unshaken in their prosecution of Dreyfus by the discovery that Colonel Henry was a forger. Responsible for the theory of forgery for patriotic purposes, Maurras imposed on a steadily increasing band his conviction that integral nationalism could not be realized without the Monarchy, and that a monarchical restoration was quite possible if its partisans were sufficiently well organized and ready to use any means for the discrediting of the existing system and the ushering in of another. It was all a matter of clear uncompromising doctrine and of will power. Taking the bull by the horns, he carried out, in the first years of the century, an exhaustive inquiry among Conservative

Nothing could seem more contradictory to the ideas of Sorel than the aims and ideals of this group, nevertheless there was a strong similarity between the two at many points. Of this similarity mention will be made shortly.

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leaders to discover how many would be prepared to welcome the King back into his own: the results, embodied in his book, L'Enquête sur la Monarchie(1900-1909), were favourable enough for the launching of a definitely Royalist organization, which soon superseded the moribund Ligue de la Patrie française. Until the outbreak of the war nationalism was scarcely to be distinguished from the new body, nor its creed from the philosophy of Maurras, who in almost daily articles and numerous books carried on a relentless propaganda on which it is hard to pass an equitable judgement. Great powers of style and extraordinary lucidity of thought and expression, a singular gift for repeating the same arguments in a thousand unforgettable forms, were joined to violence of invective, readiness to misrepresent adversaries and complete disregard for the ordinary decencies of controversy: all who disagreed were fools or rogues, usually both; France was daily being betrayed, and imagination was never lacking for the discovery of something to make the reader's flesh creep. Nor was the violence confined to language, or revolution an academic abstraction. Direct action was the principle on which the policy of the movement was based: personal intimidation and assault, breaking up meetings, organized resistance to authority whenever practicable, terrorization of opponents in every possible form, such were the methods, both before and -- especially -- after the war, of the party which claimed to be rooted in social order. It is probable, in fact, that more moderation and a greater readiness to credit the sincerity of opponents would have proved more successful: many potential friends were alienated by this perpetuating of a polemical spirit and of methods of brutal violence that all decent people believed to have been buried with the end of the Dreyfus crisis. The reply of Maurras was, of course, that the crisis was not over; that France was more than ever in the hands of those Jews, Protestants, Freemasons and naturalized aliens who were always sacrificing her to their own nefarious schemes.

"The doctrine of Maurras and the Action française -- it is scarcely necessary to distinguish between them -- is but the nationalist creed writ large, and we need stress only three of its specific aspects, Monarchy, Decentralization and Catholicism."(Soltau, FPT, 386-89)

Immediate factors in Sorel's monarchist relations. Georges Valois, a former disciple of Sorel, had shrewdly detected both the value and the difficulty in his master's work. He recognized the highly theoretical character of it and in 1904-1905 he proceeded to extract from it a more realistic doctrine remarking that Sorel "avait interpréte le mouvement syndical contre les leçons de la realite."(5) By 1906 Valois was to be found in the ranks of the Action française where he was applying the teaching of his master to the edification of the monarchist supporters. About 1907 he also founded Revue critique des idées et des livres which was the instrument of an attempt to unite the anti-democrats of the right and left respectively. Both Sorel and Berth contributed to this review of their former disciple. La Cité française was another review with strong nationalistic tendencies to which Sorel contributed, indeed it was founded by Sorel, Berth, and Pierre Gilbert. The review failed to appear however.(6) The article prepared for the first issue by Sorel, like all of his articles of this period, present all the old themes, anti-democracy, pessimism, anti-intellectualism, and moral heroism; this time with a strong nationalistic bias running through the whole.

In 1910 Paul Bourget translated Sorel's ideas into bourgeois terms in his work La barricade and Sorel said concerning it, "Je serais heureux si son grand talent pouvait

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5. Valois, USA, 208.

6. Sorel's article is reproduced in Johannet II, 206ff.

déterminer la bourgeoisie à se défendre et à abandonner enfin, en face de la courageuse ardeur de l'adversaire, sa coupable et peu glorieuse résignation."(7) This work of Bourget was in the form of a play and actually did not offer a solution of the problem of labor and the middle class. It simply revealed a middle class that could be as stubborn and militant as the workers, and at the end of the play both worker and employer were to be found on 'different sides of the barricade.' However he made it clear in an article that accompanied copies of the play that he had created it on the basis of Sorel's theories, particularly on the theory of direct action which in the play is used by workers and employers both. Bourget portrayed a fighting middle class as Sorel believed that it once was and might become again.

In 1911 the first issue of L'Indépendance appeared under the direction of Sorel and Jean Variot. In 1912 there also appeared the Cahiers du cercle Proudhon and was the expression of a group founded in 1911 by Valois, Berth, and Henri Lagrange, and it was fully intended at that time to put the organization under the direction of Sorel. It was in relation to this group that Sorel seemed definitely to have committed himself to monarchist tendencies. In 1914 the Proudhon group demanded the restoration of the monarchy and Berth was prominent among them. Moreover, in 1913 Berth had also written a tribute to both Sorel and Maurras, arguing that it was out of the work

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7. Pirou, GS, 40.

and thought of these two that both France and Europe would be regenerated.(8) In view of the close relations between Sorel, Berth, and Valois, it naturally appeared that the former had committed himself to the restoration of the monarchy. Indeed it was largely through the actions of his disciples that Sorel was drawn into the monarchist group. Actually Sorel at no time made a statement capable of supporting the thesis that he desired the return of the monarchy in France. It is for this reason that Pirou and others have maintained that this conclusion was merely a fiction based on the actions of his disciples Berth and Valois. Certainly it seems to have been largely their actions that provided the immediate factors which drew Sorel into association with the reactionary monarchist group.

Similarities between the theories of Sorel and those of the Monarchists. Apart from the influence of his former disciples entirely, there was much in the doctrines of Sorel that fitted into the scheme of Maurras and his group almost as well as formerly it fitted into syndicalism. First of all there was the anti-democratic note that characterized Sorel's work. This fitted most naturally into the monarchist ideology which hated the Third Republic more than anything else, except perhaps the Jews. Although optimistic in its outlook, nevertheless the members of the Action française could find in Sorel's pessimism of conduct a harmonious relation with their own views: they too had tremendous obstacles to overcome, and

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8. Pirou, GS, 44,5.

the recognition of such handicaps was after all no small part of Sorel's theory of pessimism. And in the hurdling of these obstacles was there not also involved something of the moral heroism Sorel had so admired in the Greeks and early Christians. There were also moral and religious affinities between Sorel and Maurras. The latter was constantly reminding his followers that the crusade in which they were engaged was a moral one which had as its aim the elimination of moral and social corruption that was ushered in by the Third Republic.(9) From the religious point of view there was also an affinity bewteen them. Sorel had been a keen student of church history and in general quite sympathetic to the aims of Christianity, more particularly in the moral field. He had also expressed strong Catholic sympathies at times. One of the chief aims of the Maurras group was the restoration of the power and priviliges of the Catholic Church. Sorel's suggestions concerning a stiffening of middle class resistance against the advance of republicanism and socialism had also been observed by members of the extreme right. Valois had carried this doctrine right into the ranks of the Action française. There was also a sense in which Sorel might be said to have made his bid for social change among the elite rather than among the proletariat as usually interpreted. He had appealed to the syndicats which in

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9. Dimnet expresses the same belief in the moral degeneracy that accompanied the birth of the Third Republic. Indeed Dimnet and Maurras express the same point of view as a whole.(See Dimnet's FHA)

reality were formed of the aristocracy of labor rather than of the lowest elements of the working class. Maurras too was bidding for the support of the elite, albeit a different type from the former. Finally, Maurras made no attempt to hide his method of direct action by which he hoped to make a sudden coup d'état. The method was already in widespread use by Maurras' group although in such minor affairs as breaking up meetings of opponents and so on; in this latter there was some evidence to prove that Maurras had more respect for the Sorelian theories of violence perhaps than the master himself. The former certainly made no such fine distinctions in the nature of violence as did Sorel.

From the foregoing then, it is obvious that Maurras and his friends could find much in the doctrines of Sorel to apply to their own movement despite the fact that Sorel's work had been for the guidance of the extreme left rather than the extreme right. Indeed, Maurras seems to have applied the theories long before Sorel came into contact with him, namely, through the transmission of Sorel's theories into the Action française by Valois, his former disciple.

Sorel's influence in this period. Few writers have indicated that this was the most influential period of Sorel.(10) Yet this seems to be the case despite the fact that most of

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10. I have found no writer thus far who flatly asserts that this monarchist period was the most influential in the career of Sorel, although they all agree on the fact that he had very little influence directly on the socialist or syndicalist movements.

his biographers make but brief mention of this period in his life. It was not due to any statement of Sorel himself that his influence became so great on the Action française group, indeed the general membership knew little about Sorel who at no time advocated the return of the monarchy. Whatever fame he might be said to have had only came as a result of Bourget's play. Sorel's influence however, was most important at the point where it was calculated to do most good, namely, among the leaders. Maurras, Barrès, Bourget, Valois, and Variot, these were the men who knew best the work of Sorel and they were flattered by his association with them, at the same time benefiting from his shrewd observations on social problems and conditions in France. They were not slow to use his name and theories as well as whatever influence he may have had over public opinion as the result of his popularity following the enthusiastic reception of Bourget's drama. It is for these reasons that this period of Sorel's life is here considered the most influential in terms of actual personal prestige and influence in a party to which he belonged.

That this should be Sorel's most influential period is something of a paradox since it can be safely asserted that he did not display the vigor and enthusiasm in this movement that he did in his socialist and syndicalist periods. Just how he was drawn into the movement is in itself a problem. As already indicated, there seems little doubt that his disciples were for the most part responsible. It is also quite possible that Sorel was flattered to have the recognition of men such as

Maurras and Barrès, particularly the former. Despite their use of violence, invective, and hypocrisy, this group was in many ways the most brilliant in France. Intellectuals and aristocrats were numbered among their adherents and they had ties with some of the best families of France. Since Sorel was himself fundamentally an intellectual it is not at all surprising that he should be flattered by the friendship of such men : Leon Daudet and others were not met with under ordinary circumstances. Indeed they represented the brilliance and honor that had for centuries prior to the growth of republicanism surrounded the best minds of France.

Pirou has tried to prove that Sorel's moral preoccupations were the most influential factor in his association with the monarchists. He argues that Sorel was willing to serve any group that was capable of ushering in a new moral order in harmony with Sorel's views. Indeed Pirou's whole thesis is an attempt to show that Sorel's various affiliations were entered into in the hope that in one of them he would find an agency whereby he could put his moral reforms into effect. That this is to some extent true cannot be denied, but it does not follow that this was the uppermost thought in the mind of Sorel. In the monarchist alliance it scarcely seems credible that Sorel became associated with Maurras for the purpose of ushering in moral reforms. Granting that some of these men did desire to usher in a new morality to replace what they believed to be a general condition of republican degeneracy, it was surely obvious to Sorel that their principal aim was the restoration

of a political and social system that had been far more degenerate in its day than any since that time. Sorel was too well acquainted with the middle class to believe ~~in~~ in the naive moral propaganda disseminated by Maurras. It seems far more reasonable to suppose that Sorel was drawn into the group by the actions of his disciples coupled with a desire on his part to associate with some of the most brilliant minds in France.

Conclusions. The most important element of this period of Sorel's life lies in the fact that despite the apparent contradiction of monarchist aims with all that he had formerly believed, this was his most influential association of his entire life, considered from the point of view of personal influence and prestige.

All of his characteristic teachings appear during this period, this time with a nationalistic bias. Naturally his proletarian advice and admonitions do not appear in specific form since he had left the syndicalist movement with the express purpose of devoting himself to other studies. However, his pessimism, anti-democratic sentiments, anti-intellectualism, and his moral interests, still occupy a prominent position in his writing of this period.

As to the paradox of his appearance in a group so contradictory to his former interests, it has been suggested that this was due to the work of his disciples coupled with a desire on his part to become associated with some of the brilliant French intellectuals. It is significant that Sorel at no time expressed a desire for the return of the monarchy thereby

indicating that he had never entered seriously into the movement sponsoring the return of the hereditary monarchy.

Finally, it was observed that despite the apparent contradictions between the proletarian aims of Sorel and the royalist aims of Maurras, there was a good deal of similarity from the point of view of methods to be pursued, particularly in regard to the method of direct action.

CHAPTER VII

SOREL'S FINAL PERIOD

The outbreak of the World War cast a deep gloom over Sorel. It was not so much the war itself that concerned him, he had once predicted that such a possibility was far from being preposterous.(1) Nor was it the pacifist horror of war that worried him; violence had been his theme for many years. What troubled him most was the democratic sentiments of the Allies. That these were merely hypocritical expressions for the purpose of cloaking capitalist colonial and commercial aims he was quite well aware. Indeed when most men were believing the democratic propaganda of the warring nations, Sorel was attempting to single out the specific motives which he knew existed in the marts and cabinets of the capitalist nations. Bitterly anti-democratic throughout his most significant periods, these pretentions of the Allies were all the more disgusting in his eyes. Even the members of the Action francaise had thrown in their lot with the Allies, forgetting their hatred of democracy in favor of their intense nationalism. For the most part the socialists and syndicalists had rallied to the defense of France, so that Sorel was completely cut off

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I. Sorel, RV, 110.

all his old associations; he had good cause for discouragement. Then like a bolt out of the blue came the success of the Bolsheviks in Russia and the hopes and spirits of Sorel revived, this time in favor of his first love -- the working class. That the inspiration should come from Russia has a double significance. First it was in Russia that revolution along the lines laid down by Marx would be most likely not to come. Those fatalists who had interpreted Marx in a purely mechanistic fashion, had always insisted that the socialist revolution could only come in a country where capitalist methods of production had developed sufficiently to create a revolutionary working class. Apparently with this in mind Sorel wrote:

> On pourrait dire de Lénine qu'il veut, comme Pierre le Grand, forcer l'histoire. Il prétend introduire, en effet, dans sa patrie le socialisme qui, suivant les maîtres les plus autorisés de la social-démocratie, ne pourrait succéder qu'à capitalisme très développé. . . . Il ne manque ~~que~~ pas de socialistes notables pour traiter de chimérique l'entreprise de Lénine. . . .(2)

In the second place he seems to have been aware of the revolutionary developments as early as 1916 at least, because in an interview with Johannet he said, "Le tsar finira sur la potence."(3) It is also significant that in Lenin he saw a man not committed to utopian dreams and he commended him on his realistic outlook.(4)

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2. Sorel, RV, 443,4.

3. Pirou, GS, 48.

4. Sorel, RV, 446.

There are not sufficient writings of Sorel from this period to indicate fully the complete trend of his thought. However, all indications point to the fact that his most characteristic doctrines were still dominant at this time. First, his bitter antagonism towards democracy increased if anything, particularly in view of the threat of Allied intervention in Russia to restrain the Bolsheviks.(5) In his doubt concerning whether the new Russian regime could survive there is a trace of his old pessimism. Subsequent events revealed that the Soviets were to resist intervention by displaying a heroism born of a social myth, namely, the myth of the saving grace of Bolshevism. In his tribute to Lenin there is also a suggestion ~~that~~ that the latter was fulfilling the role of moral hero as conceived by Sorel. And finally, as already observed, Sorel turned back to the proletariat as the means whereby the new social era he had conceived would be ushered in. One wonders in this connection if Sorel had suddenly remembered that his dead wife, whom he had loved so well and had been a living example of moral integrity, was after all a member of the proletariat. In any case it is interesting to note that a tribute to her follows his tribute to Lenin. Incidentally the tribute to his wife brings to mind the importance he attributed to the family in moral matters.

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5. Sorel, MTP, 53.

CHAPTER VIII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

From the preceding chapters it is obvious that the work of Sorel presents no outward manifestation of unity. As traditionalist, socialist, syndicalist, monarchist, and finally as admirer of Lenin, his associations present only a bewildering lack of consistency.

However, a survey of his writings reveals much more consistency than these outward manifestations. The preceding analysis of his works has revealed two possible unifying factors in his social philosophy, namely, his moral preoccupations and certain fundamental ideas first expressed in his traditionalist period.

It has been shown that Sorel's moral interests held a prominent place in his thought in every period of his life. However, there seems to have been a development in this regard. First as traditionalist he seems to have been more concerned with the theoretical and metaphysical aspect of morals. In his socialist period his introduction to the Marxian conception of history revealed to him something of the relation between economics and morality. Finally in his syndicalist period he seems to unite the two by means of the syndicats which serve both an economic and a moral role which appear as inseparable to Sorel.

It has also been shown that in Sorel's traditionalist period there appeared certain specific ideas which were later developed in more complete fashion. These were, opposition to scientific and rationalistic procedures in dealing with social problems; interest in the myths of Plato; an expression of pessimism; an anti-democratic bias; an opposition to the state; recognition of class division; recognition of violence as an important factor in social change; and of course his moral interest as already indicated. Throughout the dissertation it has been pointed out that these traditionalist ideas of Sorel underwent a development during the various phases of his career, some being expressed and developed more fully in his socialist period while others were treated in his syndicalist period. The ideas developed in his socialist stage were his anti-intellectualism and his recognition of class division in society. In his syndicalist stage the following ideas were given full expression: development of the theory of social myths; a complete expression of his pessimism; refutation of democracy; opposition to the state; and recognition of violence as a means of attaining socialism.

Thus it would appear that a clue to some degree of unity in the thought of Sorel may be had by tracing back to their source in his traditionalist period the most important social conceptions of his social philosophy. In this way it has been shown that these can all be found expressed in his earliest works. This would seem to prove that he did not merely pick up his ideas from the various organizations with which he became

associated, but that he developed a number of ideas that had been present in his mind from the time in which he first revealed an interest in social problems, namely, his traditionalist period.

It will be observed above that no mention has been made of Sorel's monarchist period as one in which he developed his ideas. This has been purposely avoided because it does not appear that Sorel was ever a genuine monarchist, but that he drifted into the movement largely on the basis of interpretations of his work by his disciples. Furthermore, Sorel's writings of this period contain most of his most characteristic doctrines. However, it was pointed out that in terms of real personal influence and prestige, this was probably the most important phase of Sorel's career, also that the monarchists found his doctrines of more value than did the syndicalists.

Sorel's final period was likewise a sterile period in which he created no new theories, but revived the old ones, turning again to the proletariat as in his two most creative periods, namely, socialist and syndicalist.

Briefly summarizing the entire dissertation it might be said that it has been shown that the only unity apparent in the work of Sorel is the development of a number of ideas which may be found in germ in his earliest period.

CONCLUSIONS

Three possible unifying factors appear in the work of Georges Sorel which thereby becomes much more consistent.

I

Sorel's underlying moral preoccupations appear throughout his entire work and undergo a development from an abstract theoretical interest in his traditionalist period to a recognition of the influence of economics on morality in his socialist period and finally to a concrete synthesis in his syndicalist period in which the syndicats are regarded as the basis of both economic and social life and moral idealism.

II

Sorel's most characteristic doctrines may be discovered in germ in his earliest expressions of his traditionalist period and traced through his socialist and syndicalist stages. Some were developed in the former, others in the latter period. Developed in his socialist period were his ideas on capitalist class division and anti-intellectualism. During his syndicalist period he developed his theory of social myths, pessimism, anti-democracy, opposition to the state, and his justification of violence as a means of achieving socialism.

III

Sorel's monarchist period which is the most inconsistent phase of his work, was one in which he was involuntarily involved by the influence of his disciples and cannot be said to represent a fundamental stage of his development.

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APPENDIX

SOME GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

This chapter is intended to call attention to some important considerations contained in the dissertation which do not however relate directly to the conclusions, but which are nevertheless deserving of attention. These have been mentioned in the body of the dissertation at different places, but it is deemed advisable to bring them together within the compass of a single chapter.

The concept of revolution in Sorel. Too frequently the revolutionary element in Sorel's social philosophy is minimized in consideration of the fact that it was motivated in part by moral interests: he desired a moral revolution above all else it has been often stated. Undoubtedly Sorel's moral preoccupations were closely related to his thoughts concerning political and social revolution, but there is ample proof to show that the Marxian concept of a complete overthrow of capitalist society, by violence or otherwise, involved much more for Sorel than moral regeneration for itself. He apparently regarded the thesis of historical materialism concerning the revolutionary role of the working class as perfectly sound, since both as socialist and syndicalist, particularly the latter, this was the central theme of his writings. He first of all recognized

that Marx was correct in his diagnosis of capitalist society before making his own modifications which he was always careful to justify on the basis of Marx himself. Even in his socialist period in which he seems to have adopted the democratic method of attaining socialism, he constantly referred to the proposed socialist changes in the social system as revolutionary. The change that occurred during his syndicalist period was in the direction of a more realistic conception of revolution. His criticism of Jaures and his colleagues was based on the charge that they no longer believed in the revolutionary role of the working class. Thus while Sorel did not believe in social revolution as a mere mechanical process nor yet as a sudden armed uprising, it can scarcely be denied that he did firmly believe that a real revolution on the part of the workers was in the offing.

Relation to Marx and Proudhon. Many have felt that Sorel was more closely related to Proudhon than to Marx. While this problem has not been treated in this dissertation, since it is a major problem in the work of Sorel and deserves separate treatment, it has been assumed herein that he stood much closer to Marx than to Proudhon. In his moral interpretation of the materialist conception of history, usually considered his most radical departure from Marx, he is not slow to point out that his interpretation is perfectly harmonious with Marx. He always insisted that Marx had left room for the exercise of the free human spirit. And if he chided Marx for his neglect

of the family, he was equally vociferous in asserting that moral considerations were to be found on every page of Das Kapital.

Sorel's classification of society in terms of the economic role of capitalists and proletariat and the struggle that results therefrom was essentially a Marxian concept.

Most important of all is the fact that his most original conception, namely, his theory of social myths, seems to have owed much to Marx.

Finally, for Sorel, syndicalism was to be regarded as the completion of the work of Marx. He believed that he was simply continuin the work of Marx in the light of new conditions, namely, the rise and rapid growth of the syndicats.

Sorel's pessimism. The pessimism of Sorel was actually a hidden optimism. The pessimism that he professed was really a stimulant to action, a stimulant to the achievement of an optimistic goal as aptly illustrated in regard to the Roman Catholic Church. He argued that the latter was pessimistic insofar as it believed itself to be engaged in a titanic struggle with the forces of evil which required tremendous effort on the part of the church and her members to secure a victory in any ultimate sense. However, the optimism of the church consisted of the confidence that Christ was on its side and that in the end goodness and justice would triumph. However, the imagery of a gigantic struggle the result of which seemed to be in doubt at the particular moments of its history, called forth the moral heroism of all Christians. This was essentially a

pessimism of action rather than a pessimism in a complete metaphysical sense. It was a dramatization of limiting conditions. Applied to the revolutionary working class, the pessimistic element consisted of the tremendous opposition that capitalism could throw into the field of battle, which, in turn, called forth the moral heroism of the proletariat. From the optimistic side however, there was never any doubt as to the final outcome. Victory might not take place for years, indeed the general strike might not occur at all, but the lure of the latter would so stimulate the workers as to render them invincible and insure ultimate triumph. An example of pessimism in the service of optimism.

Sorel and the Monarchists. The chief difficulty in the way of consistency in Sorel's life and work has always been the disconcerting nature of his third party alliance, namely, with the monarchist group of Charles Maurras. The dissertation has tried to show that actually Sorel was drawn into this group largely on the basis of the committments of his disciples and that actually he never did become a thoroughgoing monarchist since he never advocated the return of the hereditary monarchy in France. It has also been argued herein that the most influential period of Sorel's life, in terms of personal influence, was this monarchist period, inconsistent as it may seem when compared to his socialist and syndicalist associations.

Sorel's criticism of the social sciences. Sorel's critique of the social sciences has sometimes been pointed out as one of his weakest theoretical constructions. However, this point of view overlooks the fact that Sorel's criticisms were hurled at a too confident rationalism in social science which erred in two ways. First in expecting the same high degree of accuracy in the social sciences as in the field of the physical sciences. Second, in generating a false optimism that often issued in the theory of the inevitabilty of social progress. In both of these however, Sorel seems merely to have pointed out elements of social science that have since become clearly recognized. Few reputable social scientists today would vent- to express belief in the inevitability of social progress, and Pareto has pointed out the importance of irrational elements in social process which render it difficult to regard the social sciences as in any way comparable to the physical sciences in terms of accurate results.

Sorel's theory of social myths. So frequently is the name of Sorel connected with his social myth theory that it might appear that this was the most influential phase of his work as a whole. Contrary to expectations this does not seem to be true at all. Neither the socialists nor the syndicalists appear to have given much consideration to the theory. Nor have his two most practical interpreters, Maurras and Benito Mussolini, given any verbal appreciation of it. Both may have used the theory in putting their programs before the public.

Thus Mussolini may have had this theory in mind when campaigning in terms of inciting speeches characterized by an imagery somewhat analagous to the imagery of the myths, but he makes no specific mention of the theory. This is equally true in the case of Maurras. It was the method of direct action that both these leaders considered most important in Sorel.

Sorel as Communist or Fascist? Perhaps the greatest interest that attaches to the work of Sorel today is the question concerning his relations to the new social and economic developments exhibited in both Fascism and Communism. The rise of both of these certainly give an added interest to his work and tends to eliminate the older problem concerning his relationship to socialism and syndicalism. That the doctrines of Sorel are applicable in many ways to either Communism or Fascism is undoubtedly true. Direct action, hatred of democracy, domination by powerful myths, recognition of the antagonism of capitalist class relations, the role of violence, and economic and moral reforms, are all features that can be very neatly fitted into the background of either Communism or Fascism. However, there are several points in Sorel's work that do not find acceptance in either Communism or Fascism. While Fascism rests on a frank avowal of the complete and final jurisdiction of the state in every branch of its relations, Communism, on the other hand, professes to be moving in the direction of the destruction of state power towards a complete democracy. Sorel would have found fault with both these programs.

In regard to patriotism, Fascism stands for the most exalted type while Communism theoretically professes to be anti-patriotic. Sorel expressed both at different times, but in the light of his most creative periods he was essentially anti-patriotic.

Despite the applicability of many of Sorel's theories, in part at least, to both Communism and Fascism, there seems little doubt that he would have expressed disapproval of the interpretation put on his work by Mussolini. In his most definitive periods, namely, socialist and syndicalist, Sorel's work was essentially devoted to working class emancipation, his monarchist relations never carried the same degree of fervor and intensity as his socialist and syndicalist relations, and it is significant that in his final period it was to the working class that he again turned his hopes. Unless one believes that Fascism is a step in working class emancipation, it is difficult to visualize it as receiving the support of Sorel. Fascism undoubtedly represents a solution of workers problems too far removed from the doctrines of Marx and Proudhon to have ever been acceptable to Sorel. While Fascism may represent an application of some of Sorel's theories it can scarcely be said to represent his social ideals. In any case, the rise of two such contradictory movements and in many ways in such irrational fashion, is perhaps an apt illustration of Sorel's intuition of the two paths leading to a solution of the problems of modern industrial capitalism. It might also prove to be illustrative of the unpredictable nature of history. Certainly there is

little evidence on which to base accurate predictions consern-ing the future development of Fascism, Communism, or democracy.

Concerning the originality of Sorel's work. Despite the fact that most of Sorel's ideas may be found in germ in his traditionalist period, it is nevertheless true that he found many of his fundamental conceptions already formed by others. Direct action, class struggle involving the revolutionary role of the proletariat, opposition to democracy and to the state, the use of violence, all of these were ideas current long be-fore Sorel expressed them. Pelloutier in particular, held most of the typically Sorelian ideas before the latter's treat-ment of them. Even his theory of social myths, usually con-sidered his most original creation, was founded in part on the basis of the social dichotomy of Marx. However, Sorel's unique treatment was indeed original. Thus it would seem that only the development of the theory of social myths and his peculiar interpretation of pessimism were truly original with him. It might be said that his moral interpretation of historical mat-erialism was also an original conception. However, others had recognized the need for such an interpretation and carried out the same along different lines than Sorel.

Regardless of the facts just stated concerning Sorel's originality, it must also be recognized that all of these ideas took on a new interest and importance as a result of his unique presentation and interpretations.

Some criticisms of Sorel. In view of the subject of this dissertation it must be said first of all that the lack of any synthetic element in the work of Sorel is one of the chief criticisms to be urged against him. Nowhere does he attempt to bring all of his writings into a synthetic whole and seldom does he call attention to earlier remarks of his on a subject. The one oustanding exception to this is that found in his syndicalist period in which he calls attention to the reasons that prompted him to leave the socialist ranks and turn to syndicalism as the proper interpretation of Marxism.

Two other features of his work deserving of criticism are the obscurity and invective of it. The obscurity is for the most part the result of the introduction of the most diverse subject matter during the discussion of a single topic. This is by no means lightened by his circuitous way of expressing his ideas. For his invective there seems to be no excuse except his emotional temperament.

It must also be urged against him that he failed for the most part to harmonize his theoretical work with the actualities of the social world. Both as socialist and syndicalist he failed completely to understand the realistic conditions of working class actualities. The result was that his influence in both these movements was very small indeed.

He is also to be criticized at several points in regard to the self-consistency of his argumants. Frequently he seems to be carried away by the strength of his own convictions and overlooks the obvious weaknesses of his arguments. This is most

obvious in his treatment of the materialist conception of history. Sorel's arguments concerning the moral aspects of this Marxian doctrine are by no means convincing, yet he goes straight ahead with his interpretation as though there were no doubt whatever concerning the validity of his arguments. Undoubtedly he believed he had moralized the doctrine of historical materialism, yet his arguments are quite unconvincing.

Finally, it might be said that Sorel's dislike for the professional scholars coupled with his rather narrow working class interests, prevented his theories from receiving a much wider application than he was able to give them. Thus in connection with his doctrine of myths which was capable of very wide application in the field of history, he restricted it for the most part to working class history and development. The application of the myth theory to religious history was really by way of preparation ofthe complete doctrine which once completed was restricted to working class history. Recognition of the fundamental impartiality of most scholars might have been the means of urging him to give this and other theories a much broader application.

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

I was born in Paisley, Scotland, June 26, 1906 and attended the grade school in Linwood, near Paisley, from 1911 until 1916. In the latter year I entered the John Neilson Institution in Paisley and graduated from there in 1920. The latter institution is similar to the American High School, but privately endowed. I came to the United States in 1924 and made my home in Everett, Washington, along with my parents. After several years work as a clerk I entered the College of Puget Sound in Tacoma, Washington, in 1928 and graduated from there in 1932 with an A.B. degree. My major field was in philosophy and social science my minor. In the Fall of 1932 I came to Boston and entered Boston University from which school I graduated in 1935 with the degree of S.T.B. That same year I enrolled in the Graduate School of Boston University as a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

In 1934 I married and some time later became a naturalized citizen of the United States.

The only professional duties I have assumed since coming to Boston were as follows: Pastor of the Quincy Labor Church; director of Men's Class in Eliot Congregational Church, Roxbury; assistant to various socialist organizers; reader for professors Earl B. Marlatt and David D. Vaughan of Boston University School of Theology.

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